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Circling the cute-kawaii: following a fugitive affect through planetary modernisms

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CIRCLING THE CUTE-*KAWAII:*

FOLLOWING A FUGITIVE AFFECT THROUGH PLANETARY MODERNISMS

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated first of all to my parents, who will never read it, but without whom it could not have been completed. And to my partner, Sam, with whom everything was discussed and every sob stifled. But it is most of all dedicated to my rats, living, dead, and yet to come: Basil, who was intrepid, a cosmonaut; Osmond, who was stately and plump; Utayoshi, who loved to live; Philomeides, who builds his brothers' burrows; And young Bartleby and Leopold, careful, curious. You inspired and sustained me.

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ABSTRACT

Emerging out of three current critical trends in literary studies broadly and modernist studies specifically, this dissertation intervenes in the scholarly discourse surrounding the distinctly modern aesthetic-affect of the cute-*kawaii*. Firstly, drawing on Susan Stanford-Friedman's conception of modernisms as decentered and disjunctive "planetary" phenomena, it situates the cute-*kawaii* neither entirely within the 20th century English and American, nor Japanese contexts but attempts to articulate cute-*kawaii* as affect obtaining in both. Secondly, its methodology participates in the "post-critical" turn in literary studies. Rather than deploying a "suspicious" hermeneutics it attempts what Anne Cheng calls a "hermeneutics of susceptibility," in which analysis is not dispassionate, but intensely invested in its object. Lastly, the dissertation is theoretically grounded by the affective turn in literary studies, and in particular Brian Massumi's conception of "affect" as fundamentally ethical in its orientation away from a subject and towards others. Its trajectory tracks iterations of common cute-*kawaii* tropes as they appear in Japanese, British, and American modernist novels which either explicitly invoke the cute-*kawaii*, as with James Joyce's cute rats, or are implicated in the

media ecosystems through which those tropes circulate as in the case of Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*. Ultimately, the aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the cute-*kawaii*, which has previously been understood as an insidious commodity aesthetic, is better understood as an affective experience with ethical experience. In particular, the cute-*kawaii* is an experience of the ambiguity of the human and non-human, self and world, and significance and signification.

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INTRODUCTION

HOW (WHAT, WHY) CUUUUTE-*KAWAII!*

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Since the beginning of the previous century, things cute and kawaii have become an increasingly powerful current among what Arjun Appadurai describes as the "global flows" of modernity, the "disjunctive," locally differentiated movement of ideas, capital, media, technology, and peoples around the world.[1] The cute and *kawaii* have suffused the mass media cultures of America and Japan in particular, but their commonwealths are many. In the 21st century, cute-*kawaii* icons of children's such as Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny, Hello Kitty, and Pikachu appear planet-wide, while the cuddly style they exemplify has become the subject of increasing scholarly attention. Curiously, while exegeses of the phenomena become more common over the last three decades, with a significant uptick in the last ten years, it has yet to accumulate extended conversation within a standard discipline. Drawing commentary from philosophy, biology, anthropology, psychology, scholarly discourse on the cute-*kawaii* appears fragmented, even before considering the unresolved, and often unremarked tension, between understanding the cute and *kawaii* as effectively identical or culturally distinct phenomena.

The first extended considerations of cuteness, John Morreal's "Cuteness" (1991), and JT Sanders' "Cuteness as a Product of Natural Selection" (1992), draw on ethologist

[1] Appadurai, Arjun, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," [*Theory, Culture, Society* 1990; 7; 295] 296

Konrad Lorenz's conception of the *kinderschema*, or "child form," to propose a purely biological and evolutionary model of cute-*kawaii*. First introduced in Lorenz's 1971 *Studies in Animal and Human Behavior*, the *kinderschema* describes the set of formal traits associated with human infants—large heads, soft, small bodies, and clumsy movement—that has come to typify conventional cute-*kawaii*. Although it is more strongly associated with American cuteness, which is predominantly infantilized, than *kawaii* which is predominantly *feminized*, "the typical kawaii appearance," nonetheless includes large eyes, an 'outsized head and a small area of facial features.'"[2] Morreal argues that cute-*kawaii* is fundamentally an aesthetic form concerned with the survivability of human children. Cute features trigger a caretaking response, he argues, which ensures they will not be abandoned. While Sanders objects to the essentializing of cute-*kawaii* form—since human babies might have evolved a different form—he maintains that cute-*kawaii* is essentially an evolutionary imperative to care for children. In the mid-90s attention shifts from the natural world to the commercial.

The 1995 publication of Sharon Kinsella's "Cuties in Japan," which describes *kawaii* as an aspect of Japanese women and girls' culture, inaugurates cultural studies of the cute-*kawaii*. Research has subsequently accelerated with the appearance of Lori Merish's "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics" (1996), Daniel Harris's *Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism* (2001), Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012), and Christine Yano's *Pink Globalization* (2013). These more recent examinations of cute and kawaii have emphasized the cute-*kawaii*'s

[2] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 4

relationship to market and statist forces, and shifting ideologies of gender and race, arguing that its affected innocence is a soft-palmed coercion to consume or conform. While the emphasis has shifted from the evolutionary to the sociopolitical effects of cute-*kawaii,* the *kinderschema* and its associations with weakness, caretaking, and dependency remains the model for understanding the effects of cute-*kawaii* on its audience.

More recent work, including Joshua Paul Dale's anthology *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness* (2016), and Simon May's *The Power of Cute* (2016) has in turn disputed the alliance between cute-*kawai*i and the various ideological institutions that dominate life under late capitalism, identifying a redemptive potential in what appears to be an erotization of submission to power. Dale synthesizes the biological and cultural arguments, defining the cute-*kawaii* as a "potential, rather than reflexive or innate, human response to a definable set of stimuli," disputing the universality of the *kinderschema* while maintaining formal continuity between things judged cute-*kawaii*. For Dale the potentially utopian sociality of cute-*kawaii* goes beyond the merely parental, and includes companionate relationships and friendships. Philosopher Simon May makes a more extreme departure. Emphasizing the ambiguity of cute-*kawaii* form, its approximation of formlessness in its predisposition to softness and squishiness, May suggests that "a contemporary way of giving voice to the ancient trope of the monstrous hybrid"[3] that can neutralize, without erasing, difference.

The present study aims to build on extant research into the cute-*kawaii* in three significant ways. First I aim to understand the cute and the *kawaii* as not only related

[3] May, *The Power of Cute*, 33

aesthetic phenomena within global capitalism but as the same (affective→ aesthetic) response recurrently expressed within the culturally specific milieus of planetarity modernities. Although various scholars have attempted to maintain distinctions between the cute and *kawaii*, citing the *kawaii*'s relative sophistication and cool in contrast to Disney's American cute, I will show how the cute-*kawaii* (re-)emerged in relative synchrony in Japan and America in the early 20th century, although it arrives by very different histories. Although most scholars understand the cute-kawaii as a postmodern and postwar phenomenon I argue that the emergence of cuteness as a commodity aesthetic in the years following World War II is a consequence of the postmodern acceleration of a modernist iteration of a premodern phenomenon. Returning to the modernist iteration of cute-*kawaii* allows us to observe the objectification of cute-*kawaii* as an aesthetic form as it occurs through modernization and globalization, and hopefully to revive its redemptive potential as a prosocial affect.

Second, in service of this I aim to employ a susceptible, rather than critical, hermeneutics in my account of cuteness. I endeavor to inhabit cute-*kawaii* in its own terms (according to the affective logic it proposes, the aesthetic fantasy it licenses). Even writers who do not believe power or violence to be constitutive of the cute-kawaii, such as Simon May, tend to emphasize cuteness's subversive edge, privileging the self-conscious ironizing of cuteness as an aesthetic by artists over the unself-conscious expression of it as innocent, loveable, sincere, etc. within particular contexts, and about particular things. Seen from the point of view of a child, it is wrong to claim cute-kawaii objects are aesthetically or affectively 'insignificant' as Ngai does. Inhabiting the fantasy

of cuteness, dolls are more than objects, and play more than non-labor. Play has a product, and what it produces is Self, World-Other, and Self-in-Relation-to-World-and-Other.

Only looking to artworks or contexts in which cute-kawaii already refers to itself—is already burdened with interpretation of the interpretive faculties it endorses—will at best reaffirm and at worst reify what is already known about cute-*kawaii*. The turn to the modernist novel in Japan and America 1853–1945 returns us to a period in which the cute/kawaii was uncodified and relatively informal. Thus when Joyce and Faulkner employ the word to describe a rat, Leopold Bloom, and Anse Bundren it is possible they're using it in either its original meaning of cunning or contemporary meaning of adorable. This undecidability is not merely a historical fluke, since the novels themselves reasonably support either reading of the word. Anse Bundren is 'cute' both in the sense of being pitiable, stupid, and childlike but also in the sense of manipulative and compelling.[4][5]

Lastly, although there appears to be critical consensus with regards to cute-kawaii's amorality, I aim to show that the mutual affective responsiveness the cute-kawaii response entails, even if it does not present explicit moral content, has ethical

[4] "[Anse] looked kind of funny: kind of more hangdog than common, and kind of proud too. Like he had done something he thought was cute but wasn't so sho now how other folks would take it." (*As I Lay Dying* 189)

[5] The Bundren family additionally indexes a number of the cultural conditions that will give rise to the postwar iteration of cuteness: the changing economic and cultural status of children, the emergence of a global capitalist culture through the dissemination of commodities and advertisements, the consolidation of power within a teleological framework that designates the center 'modern' and the margin backwards', and the persistence of 'pre-' or 'para-political' subjects at and within those margins.

import. This ethical capacity is most fully realized in cute-*kawaii*'s affective, rather than aesthetic, register. Defined as the "capacity to affect or be affected," 'affect' in the tradition of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Brian Massumi is radically open-ended as opposed to signifying determinable emotional or psychological content. Instead of cute-*kawaii* as it appears in the rationalized, essentialized context of evolutionary psychology I'm interested in where and when cute-*kawaii* departs from its recognized form—what are the possible "beings affected" we might call cute? The turn to the modernist novel in search of a less codified cute-*kawaii* is thus a turn to the modernist novel in search of cute-*kawaii* affect. Novels, although they share with cuteness a general formlessness, have as yet not been invoked in conversations about cuteness because they are not, as objects, cute. They rarely embody cuteness as an absolute style in the way that visual media and even poetry, in its compactness, can. However, this makes them well-suited to capture the relational effect of cute/kawaii contextually—as an affective element of overall experience—rather than as it is aesthetically employed by institutions to generate intimate affect.

In the remainder of this introduction, I provide an overview of my methodologies, with particular emphasis on the importance of a "susceptible" approach to cute-*kawaii*, and outline the themes to be plumbed, and the motifs to be followed in the chapters.

Methods and Motives: Being Suspicious, Becoming Susceptible

My methodology derives primarily from the post-critical turn in literary studies, and the turn towards planetarity in modernist studies, though it is also broadly informed by the work of post-structuralists and affect theorists. These hermeneutic frames have particular resonance with one another, and with the cute-*kawaii*. They gesture to each other. Susan Stanford Friedman begins *Planetary Modernisms* not by reviewing the limitations of the transnational and global as frameworks for modernist studies—to which planetarity is ostensibly opposed as a corrective—but by tracking the dynamics of suspicion across three generations of modernist studies. In succession, anglophone Modernism places Western modernity under suspicion, problematizing Enlightenment rationality, and then is itself placed under suspicion by post-modernism which mistrusts modernism's proximity to modernity. Friedman implies that the definitional vortices of modernism/modernity, wherein modernism figures simultaneously as establishment and anti-establishment, are as much a consequence of shifting attachments as of shifting objects, positioning planetarity as a means of accommodating attachments beyond disciplinary boundaries.

In turn, Rita Felski's premiere example of a text's capacity for enchantment, a capacity she describes as "the antithesis and enemy of criticism" and its hermeneutics of suspicion,[6] is Hayao Miyazaki's globally successful, and affectingly *kawaii Spirited Away*. A coming of age story in which a young girl enters the employ of a witch's bathhouse in order to rescue her parents from the spirit world, the film is "literally a story

[6] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 56

of enchantment, of shape-shifters, androgynous creatures, uncanny doubles, loquacious animals, and a gigantic baby the size of a Colossus"[7]—an array of cute-*kawaii* tropes—that is told enchantingly: the film's style echoes the protean excesses of its inhabitants, its "seductiveness...pivots around its visual puns, glorious colors and exceptionally inventive and imaginative images...the comical grotesquerie of the portly, lumbering radish spirit...the vision of a magical train gliding silently below the water's surface."[8] An incredibly lucrative commodity, Felski cautions that *Spirited Away's* "commodity status constitutes one facet of its existence, rather than...all determining essence that drains it...of all claims of beauty and aesthetic value."[9] The economic and cultural conditions of its production are not accurate predictors of the "aesthetic response" it elicits.[10] Post-critique and planetarity are particularly pertinent to a study of cute-*kawaii*, an affect Ngai describes as "routinely overridden by secondary feelings of suspicion,"[11] whose modern and post-modern, and Eastern and Western manifestations are, I argue, in continuity.

Although the turn from critique is most clearly and urgently articulated at the present moment, critics of critique have existed at least since the early 20th century. Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation" (1966)argues for an "erotics of art" as opposed to a hermeneutics, while Eugene Goodheart in *The Failure of Criticism* (1978), argues that the practice of critique divorces literature from a progressive reformist tradition with the insularity of its jargon. In *The Company We Keep* Wayne C. Booth makes a similar

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[7] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 65
[8] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 66
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 25

argument, elaborating the ways in which texts on their surface demand that we engage political and ethical reasoning. Even Adorno cautions against a total subjection of culture to critique. In a section of *Minima Moralia* entitled "Baby with the Bath Water" (babies, we might observe, are cute), Adorno warns that "with the logic of coherence and the pathos of truth," cultural critique might result in "relationships [that are] entirely reduced to their material origin," in which individuals appear only as the consequence of ideological conditioning, as predetermined sets of enlightened class or base economic interests. Striving to unveil the objective power relations undergirding the cultural therefore risks expurgating "with the false, all that was true also...every chimerical anticipation of a nobler condition, and so bring about directly the barbarism that culture is reproached with furthering indirectly."[12]

I want to give particular attention to Marxist critic Masao Miyoshi who links questions of critical suspicion and planetary community in two articles: "Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality" and "The University, the Universe, the World, and 'Globalization.'" Writing in the 90s, in the aftermath of the theory wars of the 1980s, amidst the proliferation of gender, queer, and race studies departments, and the dawn of globalization, Miyoshi cautions against a universal suspicion of universality. He writes, "Earlier in the second half of the twentieth century, the logic of difference was a strategy of liberation." Critique after critique of cultural hegemonies led to the appearance of more particularized social units that generated their own "autonomous and independent, [and] incommensurable space" for meaning production. However the consequence of

[12] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 43-44

"the logic of difference" which drives critical suspicions of hegemonies is that a public that "want[s] to understand its place in the 'globalized' world'" cannot turn to literature to effect that understanding since "the public is excluded and unwanted as long as it refuses to learn the jargon of partisans and to become partisan."[13] Miyoshi's solution is to shift our sense of totality from the political to the planetary. Taking global climate change as a productive site for imagining a new 'inclusive totality", he enjoins literary studies, "to nurture our common bonds to the planet—to replace the imaginaries of exclusionist familiarism...with the ideal of planetarianism" and, in service of this project, "to reimagine our common and universal culture as we have never done in history."[14]

To conceive of such an 'environmental totality' demands, as its first step, overturning a logic of difference that forecloses 'rethinking social totality' and to develop, as its second step, transdisciplinarity such that "knowledge and learning remain undivided and inclusive" and "the world, the globe, the universe, and all living things [will] constitute the base of our studies and investigations, in fact, of our consciousness itself."[15] While I am sympathetic to Miyoshi's position, which maintains a linkage between the political and the aesthetic, global climate change seems insufficient in itself as a substitute or supplement to critique. Miyoshi retreats from the problem represented by critique inasmuch as he seems to suppress the meaningful gains made by the critical practices of minority groups. Any 'inclusive totality' premised on subsuming the reading practices of marginalized persons seems to have failed by definition. Thus, pursuing

[13] Miyoshi, "Turn to the Planet," 295
[14] Miyoshi, "Turn to the Planet," 296
[15] Miyoshi, "The University, the Universe, the World, and 'Globalization.,'" 32, 34

planetarity through the post-critical turn, my methodologies have been most influenced by the work in the tradition of Eve Sedgwick, Bruno Latour, and Rita Felski, who argue not against the content of critique but against its dominant mood or affect, though I maintain the aim of thinking an "inclusive totality."

Sedgewick anticipates the post-critical turn in "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" introducing the two poles that will come to frame debates about the affects and ethics of reading while Latour's "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" and Felski's *The Limits of Critique* inaugurate the post-critical turn proper. In his article Latour more forcefully articulates Miyoshi's concerns about the political efficacy of critique while at the same time undermining his proposition that global warming might become the nucleus of planetary consciousness. Critique, Latour argues, is no longer an adequate tool for an emancipatory politics because our pressing problem is no longer "an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact" as it was when critique was developed as an Enlightenment tool for demystification. Rather, our political crisis takes the form of "an excessive distrust of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases.'[16]' This is spurred by the popularization of critique, now widely practiced as conspiracy theory. Global warming is the premier example of the latter problem as the "real, objective, and incontrovertible fact" of its existential threat is critiqued from the right as an "illusion of prejudice" generated by left-leaning, elitist, academics. Inasmuch as global warming is a "matter of fact" it can be continually subjected to the critical view that sees facts as projections and prestidigitations of power

[16] Latour, "Has Critique Run Out of Steam?", 227

relations, including that of expert/amateur. In *The Female Thermometer* Terry Castle still more forcefully makes the claim that, "The demystifying project was peculiarly compromised from the start." Paralleling Horkheimer and Adorno's arguments in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the 'modern' scientific is continuous with the pre-modern ritualistic, Castle suggests that despite demystification's pretension to objectivity it risks becoming a "debunking mania, or a compulsion to disprove" in which one might become lost "in an alienating welter of evidence and counterevidence."[17]

Thus, the practice of critique results in an "impasse" wherein "it becomes impossible to distinguish so-called normal collective convictions from pathological ones."[18] It becomes impossible, that is, to cohere as an "inclusive totality" since in the light of suspicion all attempts to cohere appear as potential coercion. What is needed, Latour says, is a tool for addressing "matters of concern" that will no longer aim to "debunk" as critique has done to fact, but "to protect and care."[19] To that end Latour borrows a Heideggerian conception of the "thing." Distinguished from the object of scientific knowing, which presumes a masterful knowing subject, the Heideggerian 'thing' represents a "gathering" that indexes our entanglement with rather than our detachment from the world.[20] Regarding the world as made up of things rather than objects has the counterintuitive effect of making it both more objective and subjective.

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[17] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 213
[18] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 214
[19] Latour, "Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" 232
[20] One example Latour gives is the difference between an abstract 'stone' and the mineral dolomite. The stone, as an object, is a matter of factual content: hardness, usefulness. Dolomite, in its particularity, "is so beautifully complex and entangled it resists being treated as a matter of fact" (234). It becomes a "matter of concern" by virtue of the aesthetic properties that hail us in a way that is not reducible to ideological interpellation or commodity fetishism.

Subject and object are understood as properly belonging with, residing in, and affecting the other. Although our attachments to things really are conditioned by preexisting social structures and power dynamics, they nonetheless really are our attachments and we must take them seriously as such. This means not pretending that attachment to institutions or practices can be demonstrated away by critical maneuver, but investigating how and why we become attached to what we become attached to. For Latour, the work of critics going forward should not be to 'debunk' but to 'assemble,' to enable the mediation of multiple concerns in multiple disciplines through multiple things.

Felski identifies the effects of critique in literary criticism with the predominance of a "hermeneutics of suspicion," a term originating with Paul Ricoeur that initially characterized modes of reading influenced by Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx but is used by Felski to describe a variety of permutations that have arisen since including New historicism, post-colonial studies, and post-structuralism. What unites these schools of thought under the sign of suspicious hermeneutics is an "adversarial sensibility" toward the text as a site of "concealed, repressed, or disavowed meanings," a "conviction that the most rigorous reading is one that is performed against the grain" and "that the primary rationale for reading a text is to critique it by underscoring what it does not know and cannot understand."[21] In redescribing critique as suspicious hermeneutics Felski brings to light affective dynamics that are latent in Latour's account. "Suspicious reading," she

[21] Although Felski notes that "not all literary theory manifests an adversarial and distrustful attitude to the literary work", citing deconstruction specifically as celebrating the radical singularity of the text, she is quick to point out that "suspicion is not so much dissipated in such arguments as displaced" (). The otherness of the text in post-structuralist theory is valued precisely because it places under suspicion "commonsensical forms of language and thought" that make up the world we live in.

writes, “is not just an intellectual exercise in demystification but also a distinctive style and sensibility with its own specific pleasures."[22] Linking the practice of critique to the affect of suspicion renders more immediate the political limitations of critique. It is difficult to imagine a community founded on “an asocial form of affect that sows division and conflict.” But Felski also takes seriously our attachment to suspicion, and how suspicion attaches us to the texts we read. For instance by “an interest in plotting.” The critic, assured of its superior position of knowing in relation to the text, is able to identify patterns and attribute causes. Like a detective investigating a crime, the critic reconstructs obscured causalities and assigns guilt. However, Felski argues, “the adversarial structure of such reading also contains a tacit tribute to its object, an admission that it contains more than meets the eye.”[23]

The suspicious mode of reading therefore masks a positive attachment to the text. This becomes clearer when we think of suspicion as a defense mechanism. Although Felski describes the affect primarily as an aggression directed towards the text, British Psychologist Alexander Shand, whose work she draws on, considers it foremost a defensive mode. He describes the tendencies of suspicion as “watchfulness”, “secrecy”, and “preparedness” for the eventuality that someone or something “may attack us or those we love.”[24] This last is, for Shand, the most fundamental function of suspicion, and the readiness with which suspicion regards its object suggests a more radical proximity to it. “If we are suspicious of someone we have met at social gatherings,” Shand writes, “we

[22] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 222
[23] Felski, *Limits of Critique*,
[24] Shand, “Suspicion,” 198

refrain from inviting him to our homes."[25] Suspicion intercedes before the suspect can cross the most vulnerable threshold, but only after we have been made vulnerable. Suspicion appears as a secondary effect of being attracted to a gathering, of being gathered with who may turn out to be infected with a disease, or mean to harm us, of *having been* gathered with them. We are not paranoid, Sedgewick advises us, because of what the world conceals from us, but because of what becomes apparent to us in our intimate contact with the world.

As with disgust, suspicion appears as an affect of recoil. As disgust appears to designate an object that is "absolutely excluded"[26] from the subject by ejection (vomiting, defecating, sneezing), suspicion "absolutely" excludes by withdrawing the subject from the purview of the object. It facilitates the foreclosure of what Eugeine Brinkema describes as "the opening up of the worse than the worst."[27] Not inviting the suspect to our home we're never murdered, and although our suspicion is neither confirmed nor disproven we live. Our suspicion is not therefore negated. It is affirmed in the suspension of its resolution, *reinforced*, in fact, because we live yet to see it unresolved. Suspicion operates according to what Brian Massumi calls the 'double conditional logic of threat.' It is not whether or not Iraq possessed WMDs, only the suspicion that 'they would have if they could have" that retroactively justifies the American invasion. Whereas disgust triggers a predominantly physiological response, suspicion appears to mobilize the intellect, and produces not a steamy puddle but the conception of a threat.

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[25] Shand, "Suspicion," 196
[26] Brinkema, *Forms of the Affects*, 144
[27] Ibid.

Although we are justified in considering suspicion an affect, since it designates an orientation toward the world rather than the psychological motivation of a subject, it is an affect with a peculiar relationship to conceptualization. While disgust retains Massumi's sense of affect as an "unqualified intensity," since it describes a perception of things being "unbound from their...qualities" as they decay, signaling a latent threat to the integrity of our qualities, suspicion instead appears related to the "subtractive" function of rationality.[28] While the turning of stomachs excludes, it nonetheless involves the palpable interconnectedness of subject and object. Suspicion instead turns us towards the "excluded middle" of formal logic, wherein we can "fix distinctions."[29] In a process of elimination, which necessarily rests on a principle of noncontradiction, suspicion attempts to fix the guilt of the guilty party with the set of evidence that precludes the possibility of their innocence. As it distinguishes the guilty from the innocent, the knowing from the naive, the survivor from the corpse, and the critic from lay-readers, the distinction of suspicion generates particular pleasures. It allows us to claim discernment of either "good taste," or between true and false consciousness to authoritatively delimit the set of evidence, and is implicitly a mode of individuation. The critic's relentless demystification reduces all objects to agents of ideological coercion and all relations to their most brutal abstraction; in doing so the critic affirms and isolates themselves. Unlike the masses even critics plural are individuals, considered apart from the ideological mechanisms that condition the masses of historical subjects.

[28] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 90
[29] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 85

Felski's aim in *The Limits of Critique* is expressly not to dispense with critical suspicion as a tool for engaging with texts, but to demonstrate how a predominance of suspicion limits what we can do with texts and what texts can do to *us.* She argues that the question of how we read "is not just a matter of conveying information but also of experiencing transformation."[30] The imperative to "always historicize" literary texts, or to diagnose them as symptoms of a particular political ideology, for instance, diminishes what Wai Chee Dimock calls the potential of texts to "resonate"—their transhistorical capacity for emotional contagion. Not only are new readers alienated from texts they come to view as historical artifacts but in being viewed as historical artifacts texts are alienated from a particularly literary function—to network. Felski writes, "art's autonomy—if by autonomy we mean distinctiveness and specialness—does not rule out connectedness but is the very reason that connections are forged and sustained."[31] Leela Gandhi proposes therefore we understand the autonomy of art as an "interested autonomy" that "offers refuge to the ineluctable thingness of things, preserving the rich assortment of the world."[32]

Felski proposes to escape the logic of suspicion by thinking about texts as non-human actors whose significance to us as readers are the ways in which they can forge attachments to a variety of readers, in a variety of contexts, for a variety of reasons. Wayne C. Booth anticipates this argument in his quite *kawaii*, or rather 'cute,' conception of literary texts as "friends"—a category practically determined by whom one gathers

[30] Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 171
[31] Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 165
[32] Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 161

with. We are made different by exposure to difference and in becoming different from ourselves we are brought nearer to others who have been made different from themselves. Difference entangles and accumulates, and comes to resemble resemblance. If we read Forster's *Passage to India*, for instance, only as a symptom of British imperialism and not as a complex aesthetic entanglement with it, we inadvertently foreclose the possibility of our own complex engagement with systems of oppression by undermining the precondition for our own engagement with the novel. If we read texts to articulate how they appear to us, and each text can sustain innumerable readings, how do we imagine these multiple individual readings speaking to one another? Another way of phrasing the question: how do I articulate the political implications of my attachments *for others*? To respond to the questions posed by a non-critical reading practice I've turned to Anne Cheng's notion of a "hermeneutics of susceptibility" and Susan Stanford Friedman's "planetarity" as structural principles.

"Planetarity" accommodates Miyoshi's 'inclusive totality,' but without sacrificing the specificity of subject positions in historical and cultural situ. Modernism, as a definitional vortex, assembles a variety of concerns from across cultural contexts in time and space, each with a legitimate claim to being signified by the adjective 'modernist'. The shift is, in Friedman's terms, from modernism as an analytical category to modernism as an 'epistemological mode.' She writes, "A Planetary epistemology of modernity...needs to be relational, delineating not a nominal set of characteristics...but rather defining one thing in relation to another...it focuses on the dynamics of change, or

even the illusion of change."[33] Rather than writing what modernism is, planetarity invites us to write what modernism is for me, for us, for them. It is a *mode* of being, a *style* rather than a genre—an appearing as. I derive from Friedman two models of reading for planetarity that will usefully structure my pursuit of cute-*kawaii*. The first is *re-vision*, which she defines as "the act of looking again, of defamiliarizing the familiar archive by looking anew through a different lens."[34] This strategy seeks traces of the planetary in works that have been isolated through cultural and temporal contextualization The second strategy is collage, which Friedman describes as a practice of "radical juxtaposition, the scholar's act of paratactic cutting and pasting" that "establishes a montage of differences where the putting side by side illuminates those differences at the same time that it spotlights commonalities."[35] For a study of modernist cute-*kawaii* in particular collage is an indispensable tool since it helps to overcome a tendency in studies of cuteness and kawaii to overestimate the differences between them, to see each as a degraded form of the other, or to see them as only incidentally related. Following Dale,

The "hermeneutics of susceptibility" is developed by Cheng in two articles, "Skin, Tattoos, and Susceptibility" and "The Wayward Life of Objects", as part of current conversations about "surface" reading. Related to but distinct from discussions of critique and post-critique surface reading emerges as an alternative to the critical mainstays of New Critical close-reading and the deep or 'symptomatic' reading of suspicious hermeneutics. Rather than arguing for a specific content of reading practice at

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[33] Friedman, *Planetary Modernism,* 56
[34] Ibid.
[35] Friedman, *Planetary Modernism*, 77

the exclusion of others the "hermeneutics of susceptibility" describes a possible stance towards what we read. Cheng encourages us to read "promiscuously": readers should aim to get outside "the categorical, the critical, the political" and "be led by and attend to what the 'objects' have to teach them."[36]

Envisioning the act of reading as a "mutual pedagogy of erotics", an encounter between two surfaces, the emphasis of susceptibility is simultaneously how texts impress themselves on us and how we impress on them. Writing out of the traditions of critical race theory and psychoanalysis Cheng expressly wants to preserve the areas of inquiry opened by hermeneutics of suspicion but shares some of Miyoshi's misgivings about the limitations of identity politics. Whereas Miyoshi suppresses these discourses in service of totality, however, Cheng positions them as foundational for new reading practices. "The double consciousness built into the critical stance of the racialized intellectual in race studies" models a productively ambivalent relationship to texts in which "confronting the unseemly enjoyment of others invariably brings—or ought to bring—one face to face with the ethical limitations of one's own pleasures."[37] Rereading Modernism's relationship to colonialism, for instance, we should ask ourselves what it would mean "to take the 'need for the other' seriously?" as well as what it would mean "to understand the 'racial other' as also needing otherness?" The critic does not then disavow the pleasures of reading about the pleasures of imperial projects but takes those pleasures as the grounds for inquiry. This entails, for Cheng, a "recognition of our own complicity."

[36] Cheng, "Wayward Life of Objects," 4
[37] Cheng, "The Wayward Life of Objects," 4

Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* functions as a theoretical touchstone, helping to develop our understanding of the human-animal relations that form one axis of paradigmatic cuteness cute-*kawaii* ontological indeterminacy, and simultaneously elucidating a critical logic of 'following' that will inform the hermeneutics of susceptibility I embark on. Derrida writes of the animality, "It follows, itself; It follows itself. It could say 'I am,' 'I follow,' 'I follow myself,' 'I am (in following) myself.'"[38] This is the grammar of susceptibility. Following the wayward aesthetic objects that populate the literary universe, adopting a critical stance of susceptibility rather than suspicion, Anne Cheng has suggested, requires putting the critic in the position of the object of scrutiny, at the same time that it remains the scrutinizing subject. The critic scrutinizes, at the same time, the apparent object of interest and their interest in the object, an interest that appears as an effect of a subject-object on object-us. How does cuteness come to appear to me? As what? Why innocent? And what do I mean innocent? Following myself to cute-*kawaii*, I find myself following its logic. The mass cultural artefacts which are the most apparent instantiation of cuteness saturated my weekday afternoons and Saturday mornings. I am both a consumer and product of cute-*kawaii*. Like a detective investigating the murder of himself, I have arrived on the scene already affected, and I am myself evidence and implication of the phenomena investigated—a historical and ideological artefact of a cute-*kawaii* subject. Following its logic, the cute-*kawaii* follows me, and it arrives before me as it appears. Before Joyce ever piqued me I was primed to find him cute.

[38] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 371

Susceptibility is not solipsism. It does not merely consider the interests or drives of the critic, but concerns how things come to appear as of concern to them, and how those concerns inform their ideas and attachments. In this susceptibility appears to me as a response to Derrida's rebuke of the western philosophical tradition, which has "taken no account of the fact that what they call an animal could look at them and address them from down there, from a wholly other origin."[39] Our concern here is how we might conceive of and respond to the possibility of the animal being *concerned* with us, what signs appear to be commutable between us, and how communion can be confirmed. This is a repetition of an earlier rebuke in *Specters of Marx*. More specifically levied against what has been called "the centrality of the eye in western culture," Derrida writes that "scholars believe that looking is sufficient," and therefore, "a traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts." A serious scholar as *such* believes "in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being," and therefore cannot "speak to the specter," nor inhabit "all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality." To address *an* animal, to address *a* spirit not as the assumptive subjects of some discipline's (ethology, anthropology) detached observation, but as things with the potential to respond to us would be to appear naive, stupid, silly, childish, or insane. To hear the voice of what is objectively mute is to disqualify oneself, often legally, from the rights and faculties of a subject. To be susceptible to the cute-*kawaii*, however, is to become susceptible to hearing the voices of animals, and (as we'll see) believing in ghosts. This is an experiment, and as Massumi notes, to write

[39] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 382

experimentally risks "silliness or even outbreaks of stupidity." It requires you "to be willing to 'affirm' even your own stupidity."[40] To 'affirm' does not mean to substitute a positive conception of stupidity's cocksuredness for knowing; rather it means to accept the necessarily dialogic, incomplete, and ongoing nature of "knowing about" something, or "knowing someone." It is to become response-able to what unknown thing may appear to surprise us.

The structure of susceptibility is consequently much looser than the cause-and-effect model of suspicion. "Following" my attachments to texts will involve an inspection not only of the content of those texts but of my attachments, will demand attention not only to the context of origin but also the context that emerges as I read. Rather than dutifully historicize I should be attentive to what particular circumstances have enabled and conditioned my response, how it is possible that I can, how in addressing me they might address my world, how my world in some sense coincides with theirs. The structure of susceptibility then is not the 'plot' of the critic-detective but the collection of a critic-fanatic, its content not the articulation of a hidden logic but the articulation of a present passion. History still obtains. As Stephen Greenblatt argues in "Resonance and Wonder" and Sara Ahmed suggests in *Queer Phenomenology* history can become the object of our passion, and the objects of our passion arrive through history with their histories intact. But these are only facets of our multifaceted passions, only one angle from which to approach their multiply entangled objects.

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[40] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 18

Chapter Summaries

The chapters which follow will follow the motifs, tropes, themes, and arguments traced here. Outlining one trajectory in the ethical, animist logic of cute-*kawaii* as it appears in the material and literary cultures of early 20th century Britain, America, and Japan, I will attempt to resolve or reside in the contradictions that arise in its historical and material evolution, and its theoretical presentation as it transforms from acute, to profligate, innocent, and wondrous—transforming how cute-*kawaii* appears. The first two chapters address themselves primarily to the theoretical problems of existing cute-*kawaii* discourse, outlining how two key qualities of the cute-*kawaii* have been misunderstood; the latter two contextualize Gary Cross's definition of the cute-*kawaii* as a "look of wondrous innocence" within the historical and material cultures of 20th century globalization. The progression will demonstrate key ethical capacities of the cute-*kawaii* which have been belied by the scholarly emphasis on its post-WWII commodity incarnation.

The first chapter builds the theoretical framework of an ethical conception of the cute-*kawaii*, arguing that the cute-*kawaii* is not primarily an aesthetic, but an affective experience, and that qualities which appear essential to its aesthetic form—weakness, naivete, violence, disgust—are a secondary effect of its attachment to the commodity form. Foremost, the chapter is a dialogue between myself and Sianne Ngai, whose analysis of commodity cute-*kawaii* is both sound and compelling, but insufficient. Focusing only on the reified aesthetic form of cute-*kawaii*, Ngai obfuscates how cute-*kawaii* affects and appears as things outside of commodities—for instance, persons, pets,

plants, or onomatopoeia. My argument centers on a re-reading of the etymological evolution of the cute-*kawaii,* understood as soft, malleable, and dumb, from the older 'acute,' meaning sharp, cunning, intense. Occurring in the early 20th century, the shift has been read by both Ngai and Cross as the transformation of something anarchic and volatile into something domestic and submissive. Instead, I build on arguments made by Dale and May in order to show how on either side of the historical divide between acute and cute, the experience appears to involve both meanings of both words simultaneously and ambiguously. The appearance of cute-*kawaii* as "acute," in turn suggests a historical link between the cute-*kawaii* and "acuity," or "intensity"—what Brian Massumi describes as "affect." The transition between the forms of acute and cute-*kawaii* thus demonstrates not the domestication of the acute, but a shift in how the experience is represented, understood, and culturally associated. What was previously a free-floating power of affecting became attached to, and "stuck" on, particular forms and bodies such that the circumference of its circulation was drastically decreased, and its ethical reach stifled.

The second chapter will focus on the relationship between cute-*kawaii*'s profligacy, power, and the possibility of appearing as experiencing suffering as a precondition for ethical concern. I will first disaggregate cute-*kawaii* from the formal model of *kinderschema* which informs conceptions of cute-*kawaii*'s relation to power and powerlessness, and expand upon the relationship between cute-*kawaii* style, and the latent possibility of appearing-to-mean that underlies cute-*kawaii*'s mystifying, animistic indeterminacy. Then, by tracing the affective circuit of what appears as an un-cute

animal, which nonetheless appears cute to James Joyce and myself, through a series of associations in a variety of ontological domains. In addition to the recurring appearance of a "cute" "toddling" rat through the Dublin of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the etymological and semantic transformations undergone by "rat" as it arrives in English (in Ireland), my examples draw from my own encounter with what Donna Harraway calls "significant otherness." The rats with whom I live, whose expressionless eyes and emotive whiskers inspire a "feeling disarmed before [their] small, mute, living being."[41] Collapsing Dale's, Ngai's, and my meanings of cute-*kawaii,* these rats together will help to demonstrate the dynamics of power, domestication, appearing-as-meaning, and relationality that comprises the cute-*kawaii*. While for Dale cute-*kawaii*'s profligacy is related to the domestication of companion animals, and for Ngai to the intrinsic weakness of cute-kawaii that aggravates suspicion, I aim to articulate it in light of what I will call the illegible affection of the cute-*kawaii*, its capacity for appearing-as appearing to mean, to suffer experience, in spite of its expressionlessness.

In the third we examine how cute-*kawaii* innocence, underpinned by cute-*kawaii*'s animist sensibility, unsettles Enlightenment assumptions about agency, judgement, and identity. Understood as a formal aesthetic category, cute-kawaii comes to resemble "innocence" as it has been critiqued by both cultural theorists and moral and legal philosophers as promoting dependency, and enshrining power in the privileged position of an adult subject. However, by following "innocence" as it is drawn along the endless circuit of cute-kawaii affect, the ideologically inscribed boundaries between

[41] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 388

"innocent," "innocence," and "innocents," begin to blur, rendering the abstract qualities of figurative children as the indeterminate qualia of indiscriminate things. Understood as definitionally entangled with acuity, cute-*kawaii* constellates with the Romantics conception of "innocence" as "connected not only to God but to active sympathies and primal love," not a pure passivity, but an active force.[42]It does not merely lack sufficient knowledge or understanding to execute right action, but imagines the insufficiency of knowledge as a precondition for responding ethically to others. An active "non-judgment," as opposed to an absence of judgment, cute-*kawaii* holds open space to imagine the interrelated and cumulative causes and effects, intensities and intentions, and persons and things that assemble in an event. This manifests in the tropes of circling, squishing, and embracing that negotiate relatedness of the totality of potential meaning in gyroscopic shifts in attention between example, and examples. In two scenes which register the ethical potentials of non-judgment, from Carson McCullers *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*, feature cute-*kawaii* signifiers rapidly shift between persons and objects as the possibilities for moral or aesthetic judgement are undermined by the complex interrelations of context coming to bear on the characters (and reader) seeking to make judgments about a shooting and a dance party.

The fourth and final chapter will reunite the threads of susceptibility and cute-*kawaii* to propose a hermeneutics of wonder as it relates to a cute-*kawaii* conception of human being—of wondering about how things appear to be human. The collection of tropes associated with cute-*kawaii* mimesis, including *personification, prosopopoeia,*

[42] James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, 54

apostrophe, anthropomorphism, and *mentalizing*, have been interpreted as an imperialistic, hierarchizing projection of a (particular kind of) human subjectivity onto an Other. Lori Merish, for instance, has documented how blond, blue-eyed, pink-cheeked baby dolls reserve the disarming, endearing effects of cute-*kawaii* for a particular constriction of white domestic femininity, and alienate or assimilate racial others. The chapter will re-locate the site of cute-*kawaii* anthro-mimesis from the discrete human form of the doll-commodity, to the human face, underscored by Ngai as the simplest form of cute-*kawaii* as it appears alongside an enchanted, *wondrous*, thingly mirror. Wonder—an affect that "drives and sustains the defective rationality that gives us intelligibility where we will not even know that we have reached certain knowledge when and if we have"—operates both as a verb signifying interrogation and as an exclamative or an honorific. In both Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Natsume Soseki's *Light and Dark* encounters with mirrors prompt reflections on the interrelatedness between subject and object, interior and exterior, and human, non-human, and thing that suggests possibilities for how cute-*kawaii* might ground an expansive, planetary, praxis about wondering about human needs, and human meaning.

CHAPTER ONE

ACUITY, DISGUST, RESPONSIBILITY: THE PRIMACY OF AFFECT IN THE CUTE-*KAWAII*

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In this chapter I outline the intricate interrelatedness of cute-*kawaii*, affect, and ethics. I will first review certain contradictions that appear in the literature with regards to the intensity and amorality of the cute-*kawaii* in order to argue the primacy of affect in the experience of the cute-*kawaii*. Next by offering a revised account of cute-kawaii's etymological origin, I will illustrate how cute-*kawaii* affect appears as an ambiguous coincidence of innocence and cunning prior to its repression through aesthetic reification. Together these will: 1) demonstrate the non-coincidence of cute-*kawaii* affect with cute-kawaii aesthetic form with an historical example of the reification of cute-*kawaii* affect into conventional commodity form, which will help ground excursions into the literary representations 2) respond to the claim that, "the Western idea of 'cute' can only appear as similar to kawaii if one considers its most original meaning, which is 'clever', 'shrewd', 'keen-witted', 'sharp,"[43] by showing cute-*kawaii* retains the meaning of "acute," or "acuity," in both affective and aesthetic instances, and in both contexts, and 3), recover the cute-*kawaii*'s potential for ethical response-ability by examining what capacities are foreclosed in a historical and a theoretical example of its reification.

The lack of a moral stance in cute-*kawaii* is linked by Sianne Ngai to a lack of a transcendent, or theological dimension. While traditional aesthetic categories such as the

[43] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 41

beautiful and the sublime "make insistent if necessarily indirect claims for their extra-aesthetic power (moral, religious, epistemological, political)," Ngai understands cute-kawaii as "fundamentally non-theological, unable to foster religious awe and uncoupling the experience of art from the discourse of spiritual transcendence" and consequently, "the judgment of cuteness" lacks "any links to morality—indirect or direct."[44] She is followed in this assessment by Simon May who argues the cute-*kawaii* appears "unconcerned with morality as if [it is] unaware of conventional classifications of good and bad," and Theodor Botz-Bornstein dismisses American cute as "matter of mere stylization."[45] In Christine Yano's pithy phrasing, cute-*kawaii* characters like Hello Kitty are, "the perfect icon for an amoral age."[46]

There is considerable evidence, however, that the cute-kawaii makes more insistent and direct claims to extra-aesthetic power. While for Botz-Bornstein American cute is a purely propagandistic "puritanism," in which "the virtues of hard work, independence, dignity, and upright character...will help even the 'little fellow' to be relatively successful in life,"[47] he observes a radical potential in Japanese *kawaii*. *Kawaii* "announces itself as a self-referential style based neither on goodness or badness, but able to represent value in itself."[48] That is, it causes the thing judged *kawaii* to appear as worthy of care and attention. This appears to be corroborated by research findings, though these also undermine the distinction between the cute and *kawaii*. Cited by Dale,

[44] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 22, 54
[45] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 47
[46] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 167
[47] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 30
[48] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 44

psychologists Gary D. Sherman and Jonathon Haidt, for instance, conclude that cuteness is an emotion principally concerned with sociality and ethics, arguing that "cuteness tends to cause us to integrate objects into our moral circle: the set of entities the harming of which is morally proscribed."[49] Similarly, Japanese psychologists have published a paper arguing *kawaii* increases the carefulness with which we regard others, finding that "objects judged to be cute-kawaii...tend to: draw attention and interest; induce positive feelings; increase carefulness and narrow the field of attention; and improve interpersonal relationships."[50]

Reading Ngai's account of cuteness as decidedly amoral alongside Bornstein's assertion that cuteness is puritanically moral furthermore demonstrates the insufficiency of dealing with the cute-kawaii independent of each other. While he is right to argue that *kawaii* material and media culture appears "cooler" and more sophisticated to Western audiences in comparison with sentimental cute, what appears to be at play in both the kawaii and the cute is precisely an ethics of what appears as valuable 'in itself.' Asked "Who's a good dog?" We might respond that a "good" dog is a "cute" dog—in itself—merely because it appears as itself. Occasionally, as I enter the work-and-study room where my pets nest, I will remark that my most visible pet, "is *such* a *good* boy!" Without looking, my partner once queried, "what is he doing?" In response, I could only muster "Why..just *look* at him!" The shared capacity of cute-*kawaii* to cause things to appear as "members of a moral circle" is directly related to their status as matters of "mere

[49] Sherman and Haidt, qtd. Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 61
[50] Nittano et al. "The Power of *Kawaii*,"

stylization" as opposed to reputable aesthetic forms since, seen as a "style" rather than a "form," cute-*kawaii* is more clearly aligned with affect as an effect of *how* something appears, rather than what something appears to be.

Conversely, Ngai bases her assessment of cute-*kawaii*'s non-theological, amoral nature on the assumption that its retrogressive, weakly defined aesthetic form correlates with postmodern affective wane, suggesting that when aesthetic experience "becomes less rarefied" it accordingly becomes "less intense."[51] This appears to be incorrect. Although the aesthetic form of cute-kawaii is demonstrably "weak"—lacking in complexity, articulation, and therefore harmonious composition—as an affect it is indisputably powerful, as exemplified by our overwhelming desire to squeeze, squish, cuddle and consume it. Indeed, Ngai and others have observed there is a sense in which cute-kawaii fanatics are overpowered by the objects of their affection. Anthropologist Marilyn Ivy begins her article on the "parapolitics" of Japanese visual artist Yoshitomo Nara's "cute little things" by proffering this definition of a 'fanatic' from the OED: "as an adjective...that which 'might result from possession by a deity or demon; frantic, furious'; 'Frenzied; mad...characterized, influenced, or prompted by excessive and mistaken enthusiasm.'"[52] A *kawaii kami*, fans of Hello Kitty "experience Sanrio's catlike girl as consoling...because they feel cared for by her," and "position themselves as powerless in the face of her charms.'"[53]

Scholars too seem susceptible to the cute-*kawaii*'s power. Historian Gary Cross

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[51] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 19
[52] Ivy, "The Parapolitics of Nara Yoshitomo's 'Cute Little Things,' 3
[53] May, *The Power of Cute*, 154

boldly begins his study of the aesthetic by declaring that "we find salvation in the naive joy of the child."[54] While Christine Yano's *Pink Globalization* recounts a variety of quasi-religious encounters had by Hello Kitty Fans with their idol, the most telling is her own quasi-conversion Although she maintains throughout the august distance of scholarly objectivity, she details with the eerie lucidity of a woman succumbing to a zombie virus how sustained exposure to Hello Kitty creates sympathy, and/or complicity with Sanrio's child-cat. She interviews 'Dan' who, when he first took a job at Sanrio considered it "ironic and ridiculous," but describes to Yano the "authentic" joy of "sharing experiences and communicating positive feelings with others," even if Sanrio is "still trying to sell all sorts of things."[55] Not only does Yano believe Dan believes in Hello Kitty's message, "truly, sincerely, without the least trace of irony," she herself seems persuaded. Although she notes it would be naive to think Sanrio or its employees transcend the coerciveness of commodity capitalism, she argues "these are smart workers[56], capable of irony, as true believers," and we should therefore not discount their "quasi-religious calling...in Sanrio and its ethos of sociality and happiness."[57][58]

In fact, Yano concludes, critical dismissiveness of these "true believers," the "Adorno-arched eyebrows of disbelief," might "say more about the necessity of our intellectual posturings than about their own lives."[59] The slight defensiveness of her

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[54] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 6
[55] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 107, 110-111
[56] The implication of ascribing intelligence here, and qualifying it as "capable of irony," is that these workers are capable of critique.
[57] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 113, emphasis mine
[58] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 85
[59] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 118

concluding sentence evinces the effects of Hello Kitty's 'emotional contagion.' The prose exhibits already the tendency of cute-kawaii to enhance emotional reactivity (these are some of Yano's most polemical sentences), and to resist intellection , *at the same time that* it seems to instantiate certain ethical directives. Like the cute-kawaii Sanrio employees, whom the reader might presume naive, the cute-kawaii itself here seems to solicit Yano's protection. Cute-kawaii, therefore, should not be understood as morally neutral because it cannot be read as a set of formal moral and religious precepts of the sort associated with the beautiful or sublime (order, immensity, immortality). In attempting to rationalize, excuse, or justify the Sanro employee's faith, Yano implicitly pleads for their innocence, a concept fundamentally concerned with ethical culpability.

Affect and Ethics

Often snuggled within lists of adjectives, "innocence," alongside "simplicity," "profligacy," "weakness," "wondrousness," and "naivete," seems to be a constitutive aspect of cute-kawaii. For Simon May cuteness references a modern and modernist sense of the "innocence of becoming," and on this basis he declares cute-*kawaii* "blameless," and without relation "to responsibility."[60] Cross sees aesthetic cuteness as a modern construction formed by joining the affect of "wonder," to the condition of "innocence" : "Because wonder was lost when the natural world became the object of control and systematic reason, the look and feeling shifted to the child."[61] Wonder thus residually survives the Weberian disenchantment of the world by becoming attached to innocence,

[60] May, *The Power of Cute*, 47
[61] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 26

or, more specifically "innocents," as the concept is figured in and by children, and childhood. A fuller consideration of cute-*kawaii*'s innocence and wonder to follow, for now it suffices to note the wondrous innocence of the cute-*kawaii* is often qualified as "apparent."[62] It is not concerned with the legal assignation of guilt, but rather with how things come to appear *as* innocent. That is to say, how things come to figure in ethical considerations as *unable* to do wrong by virtue of its physical or mental incapacity, and therefore dependent on the judgment of others. The innocence of cute-kawaii encapsulates a kind of "blamelessness," and at the same time promotes our responsibility to, or for what appears blameless. Cute-kawaii engenders a response to Barbara Johnson's query, "Could there be a relationship between duty and the teddy bear?"[63]

The significance of cute-*kawaii* innocence is that it "is so empty of positive meaning and yet so alluring that it has become intertwined with much that seems to be the very opposite of innocence."[64] "Innocence," designates a positively empty category, a judgment of indifference, or an indifference to judgment that voids in advance the possibility of judgment. In this it is similar to the use of cute-*kawaii* itself. Despite the saccharine positivity of commodity cute-*kawaii,* usage of the words cute *kawaii* can express ambivalence to the object of judgment. To describe something or someone as cute-*kawaii* is "to leave it ambiguous as to whether one regards it positively or negatively,"[65] to "simultaneously assuage and insult, to sugarcoat while critiquing"[66] your

[62] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 236-238
[63] Johnson, *Persons Things*,
[64] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 6
[65] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 19
[66] Dale, "Introduction," 3

object. While innocence as it is associated with the child-form and constructed by the commodity aesthetic cute-*kawaii,* causes things to appear insufficiently aware or experienced to undertake meaningful moral action, I argue that cute-*kawaii* affect appears as an intuition of an insufficiency of concepts *as such* to secure the good. Cute-*kawaii* innocence describes what Spivak designates "the night of non-knowing" in the aporia of a decision: the inevitability that adults too will lack recourse to effective ethical concepts to make right judgments.

May's phrase the "innocence of becoming" thus appears to me to describe an index of the "overfull" quality of affective experience. In contrast to what appear as the *actual* facts of the matter in the post-hoc narrativization and rationalization of experience, cute-*kawaii* affect occupies the realm of the *virtual*. What is virtual is not immaterial. In its immediacy, Massumi writes, "the body is...as virtual as it is actual."[67] In our bodily experience of an event as it appears to occur, before it appears to occur *to* us, we inhabit a "realm of potential," amongst a "pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies" wherein things happen "too quickly to have happened."[68] Massumi's sense that this is a space of ethical possibility is underwritten by the etymology of "virtual." Opposed to its contemporary meaning of an unreal simulation of the real, "virtual" originated as a designation for things "relating to particular qualities or virtues," especially ones that are "inherently powerful and effective," and therefore capable of "producing a particular result."[69] The cooing and squealing ejaculations of the person affected by cute-*kawaii* are

[67] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 91
[68] Ibid.
[69] "virtual, adj. and n." *OED Online*

physiological responses to its "often hard to register flicker," often escaping one before it can be helped, and inducing us to include the cause of our cooing in our moral circles. Teddy Bears mediate feelings of duty Johnson suggests, "not because they teach concern for others," but because the virtual nature of the relationship "makes it impossible to say whether the object is inside or outside the subject."[70] The relationship between innocence and responsibility as mediated by the responsive affection of cute-*kawaii* is one in which anything can come to appear as innocent, including ourselves, and "in naive unity with the world,"[71] we become possibly response-able to everything.

Following the logic Massumi uses when he suggests that "ethics" is the proper appellation for the project of "thinking affect,"[72] it is exactly its lack of legible, logically articulable imperatives that vitalizes the cute-kawaii ethos, and animates our response-ability to its appeal for care. Cute-*kawaii* innocence appears as a positive emptiness in relation to concepts, and this indeterminacy of judgment translates in the style of cute-*kawaii* to an indeterminacy of ontological identity. We feel things are cute-*kawaii* when they appear as something other than what we suppose them, or with the possibility of disabusing our presuppositions. "Without even seeking a resolution of these tensions," Simon May writes, the cute-*kawaii* "seems both to be vulnerable and to *act* vulnerable," and to adjoin attributes of the "familiar and unfamiliar, human and god...masculine and feminine, child and adult, animal and human, menacing and gentle," all "in a playfully

[70] Johnson, *Persons and Things*,
[71] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan,"
[72] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 24, 34

incongruous way that enhances, rather than resolves, the mystery of each."[73]In another example of cute-*kawaii*'s influence and religious scope, May declare's cute-*kawaii* "is above all a teasing expression of the unclarity, the uncertainty, the uncanniness, the continuous flux or 'becoming' that our era detects at the heart of all existence, living and nonliving."[74]

Precisely because the cute-*kawaii* appears prior to rational discourse, before the object can be judged as such, it is suited to an Other-oriented ethics. The reflexive, transversive, and ontologically infirm intimacies it facilitates have the potential to unsettle the terms of Post-Enlightenment, Late Capitalist, moral and ethical reasoning. Because rationality depends upon a principle of noncontradiction, its moral concepts are necessarily exclusive, and uneasily account for the varieties of human ethical experience—the myriad ways of being innocent and guilty. Conversely, as "virtual" cute-*kawaii* affect "is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt." Although I do not, like Botz-Bornstein, believe cute-*kawaii* should be understood as necessarily emancipatory, I do believe that cute-*kawaii* might be usefully adapted to utopian projects. Cute-*kawaii* causes the appearance of innocence to coincide happily with the appearance of guilt. The ethics of cute-*kawaii* can be approximated to what Harry Garuba calls an "animist worldview," in which human being is relationally entangled with non-human being, and things regardless of ontological status are imputed dignity as co-actors in the

[73] May, *The Power of Cute*, 29, 72, 102
[74] May, *The Power of Cute*, 6

world. Indeed, Anne Allison adapts this concept in her characterization of Japanese play media as "techno-animist." The appearance of cute-*kawaii* characters, she writes, "animates contemporary technology and commodities with spirits," and "recuperate cultural traditions with New Age practices."[75] Not only do they "enchant everyday life," but they open a space "where such enchantment is neither discredited nor devalued for being at odds with the 'real.'"[76]

In inhabiting this ambiguity, what appears as the aesthetic 'weakness' of cute-kawaii form—often read symptomatically as a postmodern affective wane—is a correlate of both the affective intensity of its communicability, and the open-endedness of this ethical proposition. Cute-*kawaii*, May writes, "is not an indeterminacy that hesitates but one that is forthright"—is not, that is to say, a function of intellectual apprehension of a contradiction, but an appearing *as* ambiguous. Kitty Mama" Yuko Yamaguchi, Hello Kitty's designer since 1980, explains the simplicity of Hello Kitty's features, the mouthless face, "flat and abstract, pared down to the most basic lines and shapes that lead one to imagine the rest," is directly related to the affective intensity with which she is received.[77] Mouthlessness, Yamaguchi explains, entails a formal "expressionlessness" that in turn enables "people who look at [Hello Kitty to] project their own feelings onto her face."[78] It is not the discrete form of Kitty to which fans respond. Instead, it is the *style* with which Hello Kitty appears to her fans, as Yano says, "beyond the constraints of

[75] Allison, *Millennial Monsters*, 21
[76] Ibid.
[77] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 59
[78] Yamaguchi, qtd. Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 91

narrative."[79] Comparing "style," with Wittgensteinian "aspects," Richard Neer defines it as a "seeing-as," "a shift in what one does when one sees" that is opposed to what is taken-for-granted in ordinary seeing: things aligned with their conceptualizations *as* the things they are.[80] Thus, at table "one just sees forks and spoons," while "a little person in a game of make-believe" is capable of seeing "a fork or a spoon *as* something else."[81] In line with Dale's definition of cute-*kawaii* as "appeal," cute-*kawaii* has less to do with *what i*s performed, whether conscious or unconscious, than *how* it is performed, whether appealingly or not, with or without charm.

To map this distinction onto aesthetic and affect, I invoke Charles Altieri's taxonomy of internal states: affect, emotion, mood, passion, each involved in the process of aestheticization, but in differing roles. Charles Altieri differentiates 'affect' from 'emotion' on the basis of affect's adverbial and emotion's adjectival or nominal expressions. If emotion is *what* we think we feel, how we articulate our internal experience to ourselves and others, affect is *how* we feel it, how we *embody* it prior, or in addition to intellectual recognition. Emotion and the aesthetic might be said to *express*, in the sense of presenting or representing conventionally legible content, while affect *expressively* modifies the qualities of the expression.[82] The disjunction between Hello Kitty's weak form, negligible contents, and carefully stylized expressionlessness explains the difficulty some fans exhibit in attempting to articulate her appeal. Asked what is

[79] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 10
[80] Neer, "Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style," 16, 17
[81] Neer, "Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style," 16
[82] Altieri, *Particulars of Rapture*,

attractive about Hello Kitty one fan responds, "I don't know...it makes me happy to see her face. Her face...it's just....it's like a feeling I get when I...I'm addicted to...I like how she looks."[83] The response is grammatically suggestive first of all because it attributes Kitty's power to "*how* she looks," to her being seen-*as* (while leaving ambiguous the possibility of his being seen-as by Kitty in the unstated transitive "how she looks *at* me"), but also because the simile "*like* a feeling" consigns his response to a register beyond what can be represented by language.

The cuteness of Hello Kitty, then, is related to the style of her expressionlessness, the manner in which she does not express a conceptualized feeling. According with Massumi's understanding of affect as "marked by a gap between *content* and *effect*," as that which "resonates to the exact degree to which it is in excess of any narrative or functional line," this suggests that the experience of cute-kawaii is unthinkable except with, or as, affect.[84] This does not eliminate the possibility of a cute-*kawaii* aesthetic. The virtuality of affect contains "the 'germs' of forms," such that cute-kawaii affect will often coincide with its aesthetic formulations.[85] It does, however, require us to be aware of "the capture and closure of affect," as the cute-kawaii is "formed, qualified," and made to fulfil "functions of actual connection or blockage," at the levels of cultural, political, psychological, and economic formation.[86] We must be careful to distinguish between Hello Kitty's *deliberate* formal expressionlessness, and the kinds of expressionlessness

[83] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 222
[84] Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 84
[85] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 95
[86] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 96

that abide in other cute-kawaii encounters. The disparity between the formal selectivity of brand name cute-*kawaii* and its stylistic playfulness appears to be the result of market logic's attempt to contain what is called the "profligacy,"[87] or the "promiscuity"[88] of cute-*kawaii* affect: The ease of transmission between normative and non-normative forms that produces a seemingly inexhaustible associative potential that cutifies children, animals, sexual partners, commodities, and rocks that look like faces.

Cute-*kawaii* stylization appears as an invitation *to play,* and *a playing with* the form and the content of signifiers such that they are affectively charged, but nonetheless expressionless—absent of *meaning* as such. The absence of determinate meaning, Dale explains, is what makes cute-*kawaii* "amenable to manipulation by authoritarian structures and available as a tool to critique such institutions,"[89] and Dale invokes play in his elaboration of the latter potential. Being "the pleasure of play...of engaging with the cute object and of feeling one's sense of self altering under the pressure to preserve the object and one's bond to it,"[90] cute-*kawaii* possesses transformative potential. The transformative potentials of play are more central in Yano's account of Hello Kitty's appeal, wherein, she writes, "Innocence...becomes the raw materials from which to develop more complex, multilayered imagery...distancing through twists of meaning, commentaries, and nuances that fall within the framework of *asobi* (play)."[91] Yano associates Kitty's *asobi* with the expressionless expression of the "wink," a "brief ocular

[87] Joshua Paul Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 49
[88] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 24
[89] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 27
[90] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 42
[91] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 59

tic" that, because it expresses only the doubleness of an expression, what it straightforwardly *is not*, enables the coexistence of contradictory understandings: "whereby cute might be cool and vice versa, kitsch might be art and vice versa, Hello Kitty might be anything at all and vice versa."[92]

The wink functions as a "seeing-but-not-seeing," a seeing-as *an aspec*t that teases the insufficiency of the seeing-as *as such*, teasing as well "out-of-the-ordinary possibilities...beyond expectation, beyond norms, beyond values."[93] A winking playfulness also seems to obtain in both Cross's account of cuteness as "wondrous innocence," since cuteness "takes both the child and the adult to the edge of acceptable, even across the line of self-control, to a playful, unserious, anarchic moment,"[94] and more broadly in the material and media culture of contemporary cute-kawaii. In her study of the global success of cute Japanese icons like *Sailor Moon* and *Pokemon*, Anne Allison argues their appeal is linked to a "logic of play" that not only "reproduces a lived world of flux, fragmentation, and mobility"—i.e., The postmodern world of global capitalism—but also provides "the opportunity to both mimic and reweave such particle-ization."[95] Giroux describes the appeal of Disney as offering "access to a postmodern world of free-floating identity signifiers…[unmooring] a concept of selfhood from the stable social institutions and codes of an earlier generation (for instance, family, nation, and church) and [replacing] it with a performance-driven notion of the self."[96]

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[92] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 28
[93] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 55, 256
[94] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 44
[95] Allison, *Millennial Monsters*, 30
[96] Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, 18

Although her design is maximally simple, Hello Kitty nonetheless "changes form." Introduced to a new market or a new moment, Hello Kitty "*becomes*" the Statue of Liberty, a dumpling, or a *kamikaze* pilot. Not merely "*in* a kamikaze pilot outfit" but appearing as herself "*as* a kamikaze pilot," Yano qualifies Kitty's power as passively instrumentalized, arguing that "the permutations are...[a] part of the thingness of the thing."[97] However, appearing *as* herself *as* a pilot Kitty invites us to imagine her active engagement with those circumstances—whether as an enthusiastic imperialist, a begrudging draftee, or historical reenactor. Her thingness makes possible the imaginative free-play of her fans, but thingness also, as Jane Bennett argues in *Vibrant Matter*, resists the subject, and determines the terms of the subject's encounter with it.[98] As much as she is anything else Kitty *is* a pilot. The cute-*kawaii* kitty is not necessarily *made to* be a kamikaze pilot within the context of her appearing *as* pilot. Rather, she makes the pilot cute-*kawaii*, which is to say she makes the pilot appear as being vulnerable to being made, re-made, unmade, or as having been vulnerable to being made a pilot by circumstances. Cute-*kawaii*'s capacity to transform itself—to inhabit another form, or identity—is the converse of its capacity to infinitely stylize other things: to cause them to become cute-*kawaii*.

It has been argued that this capacity of the cute-*kawaii* thing to transform itself and other things, and to comfortably accommodate contradictory elements within itself, belongs uniquely to the *kawaii*. Moreover, this appears to be the experience of

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[97] Christine Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 22
[98] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*,

consumers, since "what many global fans recognize and tout is the relative complexity of Japanese kawaii, compared to Anglo-American cute," and "part of that complexity is the inclusion of contradictory elements within one concept such as kawaii."[99] It is on this basis that Botz-Bornstein distinguishes between the ethical potentials of the cute and *kawaii*. It is because the *kawaii* is a "pose posing as a pose," which "lets shine through the contrary of what it is," that it is able to produce "a subversive liquefaction of values" in "indirect opposition" to cultural hegemonies.[100] "In manga," he observes, "*kawaii* gets quite commonly combined with a mature content like glamour or evidently grotesque elements that are definitely incompatible with cuteness in a western sense,"[101] and furthermore argues that "aggressive tempers and threatening tendencies toward violence...do not contradict the kawaii style though they would be incompatible with western cute."[102]

Thus he insists, "One cannot insist enough that Barbie is not *kawaii*," since Mattel's doll "leaves no space for *kawaii*-like mystery," in her "one-dimensional play of cuteness vs sexiness."[103] Describing Barbie as an aesthetic influence, however, Drag Queen Trixie Mattel suggests that she enjoys the same winking, teasing, play of identity as Hello Kitty. In a world where "we are what we're dressed as," Barbie is "as real as anybody...the same toy from the same mold from the same factory, but if she has a lab

[99] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 57
[100] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 47
[101] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 51
[102] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 44
[103] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 53

coat on, she's a vet. If she has an astronaut suit on, she's an astronaut."[104] The manifold of Barbie's possible occupations functions identically to Hello Kitty's transformations: it produces a disjunction between form and appearing as form such that identity is evacuated. "Everyone knows *we're* not what we're dressing as," Mrs. Mattel says, suggesting she and Barbie both "pose as a pose" in the same manner as the *kawaii*. Barbie even manages to embody what Botz-Bornstein considers one of *kawaii*'s most generative contradictions. Molded from plastic, Barbie's body adjoins the top half of a sexually mature woman (though according to her fictional biography she is a high school age girl), to a sexless lower bodily stratum.

The effect is identical to the "infantilized eroticism"[105] Botz-Bornstein attributes to the *kawaii*. The absence of Barbie's genitals transpose her appearance of adult womanhood from the anatomical and formal, to the affective and performative. Like the *kawaii* performance of childishness, Barbie's performance of womanhood is so heightened in its artificiality that it comes to appear as an appearing as a woman, rather than being or representing a woman. Like *kawaii*, Barbie's identity is "only a pose," and thus involves an "interplay between active and passive components" rather than a "pure passivity." As Barbara Johnson notes, Barbie was the first doll to be made "not as a baby, but as a woman" and is therefore both a "role model and a toy," not just someone "to cuddle and shape, but someone to emulate."[106] Barbie does not passively exist as a

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[104] Molly Lambert, "Trixie Mattel Says Drag Queens Are Like Swiss Army Knives," *New York Times*, Aug 2018
[105] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 53
[106] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 165

woman, nor merely resemble one, but actively imitates womanhood such that she facilitates both the reproduction and deviation from the cultural production of womanhood.

While both cute and *kawaii* appear profligate, neither seems to enjoy the full scope of its profligacy in the commodity form. In tension with this subversive, winking delight of cute-*kawaii* play, aesthetic cuteness is functionally deployed within a global capitalist system to facilitate particular kinds of connection (between consumers and commodities), and this necessitates the closure (as far as possible) of 'disadvantageous' connections. Despite its company ethos, Sanrio's practice of "celebrity outreach"—what the company uncannily calls "building friends"—is exactly that, managing the brand's association with other public figures. Lady Gaga can publically befriend Kitty; pornographic actress Tera Patrick *cannot*.[107] Likewise, "The Happiest Place on Earth," Disneyland relies upon the capture and commodification of affect for its business model, extending even into the material and aesthetic construction of the amusement parks. As cultural and architectural historians have observed, the Disney theme parks exert intense control of the landscape, manipulating it in exacting detail in order to produce its aesthetic effect. Its buildings are designed with a "forced perspective," with their details scaled down as the structure rises so that they appear higher than they are, even though they are built "approximately three-quarters life size,"[108][109] and more than 200 custom

[107] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 100
[108] Marling, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, 25
[109] Francaviglia, "," 148

color shades were invented to achieve the park's carefully coordinated "chromoscape."[110]

This strict identification of cute-*kawaii* with a particular brand-name aesthetic form has been recreated in the scholarship in a continued investment in the forms and tropes associated with the *kinderschema*. Alluded to in the introduction, the *kinderschema* is a conception of anatomical cute-*kawaii* introduced by zoologist Konrad Lorenz. Extrapolating from the features of human infants and young animals, the *kinderschema* designates "a relatively large head, predominance of the brain capsule, large and low-lying eyes, bulging cheek regions, short and thick extremities, elastic consistency, and clumsy movements."[111] Although it has since been critiqued on grounds of both broad essentialism, and white supremacy, the *kinderschema* nonetheless remains a touchstone in elaborations of cute-*kawaii* form and affect, functioning metonymically to describe the power of cute-*kawaii* things to "graft commodity desire onto a middle-class structure of familial, expressly maternal emotion."[112] Configuring "sympathy as the basis for feminine extradomestic consumption," a dynamics of caretaker and child continues to inform analysis of cute-*kawaii* commodities.[113] Even cute-*kawaii* commodities which do not strictly accord with the formal features of the *kinderschema*, such as the *Tamagotchi*, the pet rock, or the *Chia Pet* involve their owner's more-or-less imaginary or gamified doting upon a dependent thing.

Extensive focus on the forms and themes of the kinderschema has rendered

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[110] Francaviglia, "," 149
[111] Qtd. Joshua Paul Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 3
[112] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 12
[113] Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics", 194

scholarly depictions of the cute-kawaii less acute than it could be. The emphasis on smallness, for instance, has caused what Simon May refers to as cute "behemoths—bears, elephants, whales, etc.—to be entirely overlooked, and the inclusion of this category complicates prevailing accounts of cute-kawaii. Commonly referenced in their teddy form, the transformation of bears from an apex predator into a child's companion is often unremarked in discussions of the toy. Equally the invention of marketing, media, and politics, the first Teddy Bears were produced in 1902 by Rose and Morris Michtom, but not named or sold until after the Washington Post published a cartoon by Clifford Berryman depicting Theodore Roosevelt declining to shoot a captive black bear. An instant sensation, the cartoon was reprinted across the country, and in subsequent printings the bear was re-drawn, smaller and more pitiable which would inspire the appearance of Teddy Bears on the market. While this isolated historical instant presents a discrete moment of the bear's humiliation, as relayed in Michel Pastoureau's *The Bear: History of the Fallen King*, the figure of the bear endured a long series of historical humiliations culminating in the fateful encounter with Theodore Roosevelt.

While the bear seems to have had a complex mythological significance for paleolithic Europeans, beginning in the 12th century it underwent a rapid shift in symbolic status. Previously, Pastoureau argues, the bear had occupied a liminal position with regard to the human. As evidence he gestures toward the proliferation of "tales of metamorphoses of human into bear; of protective she-bears that nurse human infants; and of monstrous love, sometimes fertile, between a human female and a bear" in Greco-Roman, Celtic, and Norse mythologies; and to an 80,000 neanderthal grave in which a

man and a brown bear had been placed "under a single slab between two blocks of stone." In addition to representing an obstacle to its consolidation of political power, a strong spiritual kinship with the bear undermined the conception of the human as uniquely made in God's image that was foundational theological belief of nascent Christianity. In some places it was thus necessary for the Catholic church "to humiliate and ridicule" the bear." While it retained to some extent its associations with virility and strength, in hagiographical literature the bear was often depicted "as tamed and domesticated by holymen," the victim of a thorn in its paw, an object subject to the ministrations of humans, laying the groundwork, Pastoureau argues, for the brutal, and lucrative, bear baiting shows of the 17th century. The bear's cuteness consequently appears to be incipient long before 1902. Consequently, what is cutified in its encounter with Roosevelt is not the bear but the president, who becomes cute—as in the case of the "babbling" aesthetic subject—by apparently abdicating his power. Displaying his vulnerability to the vulnerability of the bear, Roosevelt engenders the trust and imagined intimacy of a populace structurally vulnerable to him.

Over a hundred years later in Japan, this strategy has been re-created through the use of kyarakuta. From the English "character," or "characters," kyarakuta refer to "anthropomorphized cartoon figures," such as Hello Kitty, which "can be found everywhere" in Japan, "from straps decorating cell phones to billboards instructing the public on issues of health and safety." Most significantly, kyarakuta are strategically "stamped and stickered" onto the public persona of corporate and state institutions to make them seem "congenial and approachable," positioning themselves as "friends"

rather than “authorities.” Christine Yano gives the example of “Shishiro” (“Mr. Lion”), a kyarakuta designed by the Liberal Democratic Party that depicts prime minister Koizumi Jun’ichiro as a “caricatured human figure...dressed in a lion costume.” Sold as a doll, and emblazoning tee shirts, coffee mugs, and hand towels, Shishiro engages in a process of what Yano describes as “emergent authenticity.” Yano argues that the cartoonish kyarakuta act as “surrogates” that “multiply the power and legitimacy” of what they represent in ways that photorealism cannot. Possessing “its own sense of embodiment,” the cute-kawaii character can “take on power and being,” independent of its signified, even as “amplifies [the] presence” of what it represents. Rather than a representation, Shirshiro functions as a representative of Koizumi, who, as an elected representative himself, enjoins the public he represents into the representation of Shishiro.

Shishiro thus, like Brian McVeigh observes of Hello Kitty, “centers a discussion about self/collectivity,” and this power relates to what Megan Arkenburg describes as the cute-kawaii’s capacity to “oscillate between singularity and plurality; between valuable uniqueness...and disposability.” What emerges is a process of slippage whereby Koizumi, his double, and the public exchange properties, Shishiro acquiring authority from Koizumi, and Koizumi appearing through Shishiro as a friend to the public, while both Shishiro and Koizumi derive legitimacy from the public’s participation. In these instances, the cute-kawaii disguises, and by disguising it coerces consent for, an uneven distribution of power. However, it is not merely the case that these powerful persons and institutions presented a front of cute-kawaii weakness which masked their underlying strength. Roosevelt and Koizumi did not appear as weak, as it is commonly opposed to

strength, but nonetheless appeared as cute-kawaii. The power of the cute-kawaii kyarakuta appears as a softening of form and identity, a blurring between a particular thing and the thing it is taken to represent, a breakdown in ontological distinctions between self/other, human/non-human, and presence/absence.

Rather than infantilization, cute-kawaii affect is a process of what Donna Harraway calls "kin-making," punned away from the genealogical with the understanding that making kin is "making kind...as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relative."[114] The kin made by the cute-kawaii are "unfamiliar...uncanny, haunting, active," and thus demand "A praxis of care and response," the cultivation of responsibility through responsiveness to their unreadable gestures.[115] Harraway's metaplasmic neologism for this process is "response-ability": "In passion and action, detachment and attachment...accepting the risk of relentless contingency, of putting relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected worlds."[116] The task is to respond to what is present when you, your child or your pets make what appears innocently as a semiotic or scatological mess, and yet remain in the Derridean ambiguity of "whether one can know what *respond* means...how to distinguish a response from a reaction."[117] Affect of expressionlessness, cute-kawaii comprehends a meaningfulness of circumstances without giving meaning over to subjects and objects. The ethical and affective dynamics of cute-*kawaii* outlined above, as well as a more concrete example of their potential, can

[114] Harraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 103
[115] Harraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 105
[116] Harraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 34
[117] Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I am*, 37

be given a more secure material and historical grounding through a revision of the etymological origin of "cute" in English. We will first consider the most prominent etymologies, which oppose contemporary "cute," associated with weakness, softness, and stupidity, with the older "acute," meaning intense, sharp, or cutting. Juxtaposing both Cross's and Ngai's accounts, we will demonstrate the coincidence of "innocence and cunning" in the affect of cute-*kawaii*, and then show how inhabiting this coincidence is necessary to understanding its ethics.

Acuity and Responsibility

Although 'cute' has been in use as a synonym for 'acute' since the 18th century its first recorded use as a recognizable aesthetic concept is in an 1857 Harper's magazine ad in which a woman exclaims, "What cute little socks!"[118] As Sianne Ngai suggests, "cutification of the language of aesthetic judgment can be witnessed in the origin of the word cute itself." The diminutization of 'acute' into 'cute' "mirrors the deverbalizing effect that prototypically cute objects...have on those that judge them as such," and thus "the cute object seems to have the power to infantilize the language of its infantalizer."[119] The evolution of 'acute'—meaning shrewd, sharp, or cunning—into 'cute'—meaning overwhelmingly weak, naive, and innocent— from the end of the 19th century through the 20th, not only reflects a situated historical and material emergence, but "replicates the logic of the aesthetic it has come to name."[120] Conversely, while *kawaii* first appears in

[118] May, *The Power of Cute*, 39
[119] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 87
[120] Ibid.

the Taisho period as *kawayushi*, meaning "'shy or 'embarrassed'...'pathetic,' 'vulnerable,' 'darling,' 'loveable,' and small,"[121] and from 1945-1970 morphs into *kawayui*, and then *kawaii* "the meaning of the word remained the same."[122] Curiously, both words appear to undergo an aphaeresis—the loss of sounds from a word—with *kawayushi* shrinking to *kawaii*, but the reversal appears only to occur in the west. *Kawaii* seems to have meant "childlike, sweet, innocent, pure, gentle, and weak," since it originated as the Chinese *ke'ai.*[123]

Nonetheless, *kawaii* becomes associated with a kind of cunning, cutting, or sharpness. Yoshimi Shunya describes the "imagined community" of *kawaii* as one in which "problematic reality" is "shut out," and people can "'turn both themselves and others into goods, or pets, sterilizing the uncertain and the dark sides from their everyday consciousness." In place of acute → cute's semantic transversal, Ngai identifies a "pun on *kawaii*'s sonorous proximity to *kowai*, which means 'scary."[124] Unremarked upon by most scholars working on *kawaii* in the Japanese context, the pun features centrally in Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi* (1925). The protagonist, Joji Kowai, a socially awkward modern man who adopts a teenage girl to be his wife only to discover her capacity to emotionally and psychologically torment him, indexes exactly the oscillation between intimate domesticity, and eerie duplicitousness that Ngai identifies as the hidden "acuteness" of the "cute." Already what is signified by both the cute and *kawaii* appears

[121] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 221-222
[122] Ibid.
[123] Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii*, 2-3
[124] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 83

more entangled, and the historical processes brought to bear on their emergence more complex, than what could be accounted for within a nationally specific tradition. Accordingly, the multiple, seemingly contradictory readings that have been proposed of the aphaeresis that introduces 'cute' to the American scene come to bear also on the *kawaii*.

In his study of American cuteness and children's culture Cross identifies the reversal from "acute" to "cute" with a shift in the representation of children in newspaper comics. Early child characters in American comic strips were "the symbolic agent of anarchic cultural protest," often "serving as the stand-in for the working class or ethnic minorities."[125] These are the 'acute' children who, featuring prototypically cute features such as weakness, are not yet entirely guileless, and whose marginal position with regards to political power and social capital facilitate the comics' social commentary. Richard Outcault's "The Yellow Kid," for example, which ran from 1895–1898 in the *New York Journal,* follows the mischievous antics of Mickey Dugan (whose name affirms he's the child of Irish immigrants but whose appearance and title are suggestive of an Asiatic origin) as he "mocked the pretensions and foibles of bourgeois life and culture," and occasionally incited violent protest against them.[126] In a comic titled "What They Did to the Dog-Catcher in Hogan's Alley," the Yellow Kid leads an insurrection in his immigrant neighborhood, setting fire to a dogcatcher's wagon while its owner is menaced by dogs, and children with hatchets in "a direct and brutal challenge to

[125] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 59
[126] Ibid.

authority" winkingly addressed to his middle-class readership.[127] Over time however, "The 'acute' child at the edge of the acceptable transformed into the 'cute' child—willful, even selfish and devious at times but ultimately good at heart."[128] In Richard Outcault's work the middlingly successful "Yellow Kid", with his uncomfortably indeterminate ethnic features and willingness to invoke real world injustices is supplanted by the more popular, palatable, and paradigmatically 'cute' Buster Brown.

Whereas Mickey Dugan is impoverished, dressed in dirty hand-me-down nightshirts, and bald with the implication of being louse-ridden, Buster Brown is wealthy and stylish.[129] And, whereas the Yellow Kid's cunning is rendered ultimately innocent, in the logic of the comics, according to the marginal position that he exercises his cunning and violence to mitigate, Buster Brown achieves a 'naughty-but-nice' cuteness through the arbitrary addition of "morals." While the Yellow Kid is morally anarchic in such a way that it demonstrates the moral anarchy of his context, Buster Brown's impishness is disarmed, disciplined, and constrained by either explicit punishment (usually spanking) or by the direct address of a moral lesson to his readers. In one strip published in 1903, Buster accidentally spills a soda pop onto a woman's dress, leading his mother to flog him with a stick. Buster complains to his audience, "Resolved! That druggists are legalized robbers; they sell you soda and candy to make you ill, then they sell you medicine to make you worse." Although the language suggests social critique, the way it is (de)contextualized by the comic strip makes any attempt to connect implicit critique to

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[127] Kristine R. Smith, *Following Buster Brown's Footsteps*, 22
[128] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 59
[129] Smith, *Following Buster Brown's Footsteps*, 22

explicit context futile. Buster Brown is "innocent" because he is figured as unable to conceptualize his actions, or his relation to others, and thus the question of wrongdoing is settled in advance by the imputation of an underlying, natural "niceness" to his "naughty" behavior. The form of the comic reaffirms this by disconnecting the cute image from the moralizing text. While the Yellow Kid is "blameless" in spite of his unqualified violence because his actions respond to unjust circumstance, Buster Brown's innocence just *is* by virtue of his being a child—passive, naive, powerless.

The Yellow Kid fits the mold of what Karen Sanchez-Eppler calls a "partial subject." Describing the ways in which children can enact agency in a world which circumscribes it, partial subjects are not "fully independent actors," but are nonetheless, like the cute-*kawaii*, capable of "defining their own terms and grounds of power and meaning."[130] In his thoroughly embedded participation in the social and political worlds, the Yellow Kid achieves a degree of autonomy. In contrast, Buster Brown approaches what Sianne Ngai describes as the "hyper-objectified object" of aesthetic cuteness. Not only does he lack the Yellow Kid's anarchic agency, but he becomes an incredibly lucrative brand. Buster's name is invoked to sell shoes and children's formal wear, his image emblazoned "onto a wide range of children's playthings," including dolls, board games, tea sets, and "a cast-iron pull toy with Buster on a cart hauled by a goat."[131] In this way, contends K.R. Smith, Buster Brown helped to facilitate the encroachment of commercialism into the late 19th century middle-class home, and specifically helped

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[130] Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: the Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, *xxviii*

[131] Smith, *Following Buster Brown's Footsteps*, 98

anxious Victorian parents to imagine their children as innocent consumers rather than "innocents" in need of sheltering from consumerism. Buster Brown accomplishes this not by undermining the distinction between innocent object and threatening context. Instead, he causes what appeared as threatening to appear innocently. The acuteness of the Yellow Kid derives from an explicit relationship with what is prefigured as disgusting—his baldness being connected to lice as well as infancy—and a potential for violence. Conversely, Buster Brown's foray into commodity cuteness retains the ideological innocence that designates him and the commodities that embody him as purely passive, and harmless rather than blameless. This historical occlusion of affective cuteness by a commodified innocence has implications for Sianne Ngai's analysis of the acute, the cute, and its commodity form.

In Ngai's astute account the transformation from acute to cute indexes and disguises the process by which the aesthetic subject of cute commodities becomes themselves cutified. The "uncanny reversal" of 'acute' into "its exact opposite" reflects, for Ngai, the dialectic of violence, aggression, and vulnerability that defines the experience of cuteness as an aestheticization of powerlessness entwined with the logic of commodification.[132] The cute-kawaii object seems to elicit from the subject a "desire to master and overpower the cute object," that conceals, for Ngai, an encounter with difference in which the subject imposes cuteness onto the object as a means of managing the "intrasubjective discord" that arises in the encounter.[133] It appears initially that "the

[132] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 87
[133] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 23

cute...wounds itself, so that we may nurture it," and thus reaffirms human subjects "as dominant, all-powerful beings in the object hierarchy."[134] However, we soon resent the cute object's seemingly insistent self-wounding, and become intensely suspicious of the innocent-appearing thing's empty appraisals of our power. Feeling exploited we develop "a desire to belittle or diminish [the cute] further," but this succeeds only in enhancing the cuteness that aestheticizes their belittlement, the enticing power that endlessly excites our "desire to master and overpower"—and perhaps also to be overpowered. This impasse produces a fantasy "of the cute object's capacity for retaliation," realized by "the boomeranging of the aggressive affect projected onto the object back outward toward the subject."[135] The twittering or babbling projected as the speech of the cute-kawaii object and imitated by the cute-kawaii judge that appears to reduce the subject to the powerless dependency of the object *in fact* masks the power of the subject's own imaginative faculties. Cuteness, consequently, entails and disavows "an act of self-mutilation"[136] by the subject that manifests as the weakened language of appraisal, as well as its aphaertic origin.

Thus for Ngai cuteness is from its inception an aesthetic of sublimated aggression—an aesthetic whose innocent appearance belies the intention to cut (ourselves). Ngai explains the dialectic of cute-kawaii's powerlessness as an "intensification of commodity fetishism" in which "the object is imagined not just as an animated being but as one inviting the aesthetic subject to handle it physically...to recover

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[134] Nadia de Vries, "Under the Yolk of Consumption: Re-Envisioning the Cute as Consumable," 270
[135] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Category*, 88, 98
[136] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 237

what Marx calls the 'coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects."[137] The cute response indexes this desire for intimacy with a thing's use-value that is blocked by the implicit fungibility of the commodity form. In this model the appearance of "innocence" is deployed by cute-kawaii commodities as an aspect of this "intensification." If commodity fetishism ordinarily functions as the defacement of the human labor that produces the commodity, and gives the appearance of the autonomous intercourse of commodities in exchange, then endowing a commodity with an adorable, innocent-seeming, liveliness further represses the commodity's origin as the objectified exchange-value of human labor. By fantastically returning to the object the possibility of its status as a sensuous, singular thing in a world imagined beyond exchange, the cute-kawaii object pleads innocence of its context. In other words, "what capitalist production processes de-personalize, the good cute design re-personalizes,"[138] and thus Hello Kitty gives the illusion that the objects she emblazons were conceived, somehow, for us alone.

Ngai argues that the attempt to endow the exchangeable commodity with personalized value "requires so much counterfactual force on the part of the imagination that use can only be made visible in the melodramatic mode of 'abuse'."[139] "Acute" is thus chopped into "cute" to signal the self-mutilation of the subject's intelligence that makes possible the fantasy of an innocent commodity. While I think Ngai is right to be suspicious of the commodity form of cuteness, I think her account overstates the role of suspicion, power, and abuse in the experience of cute-kawaii, and incorrectly reduces the

[137] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 63, 66
[138] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 228
[139] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 66

affect to the formalized cute-kawaii of commodities. Dale amends it by arguing that cute-kawaii is "fundamentally benign rather than adversarial…antagonistic qualities are not intrinsic to the concept of cuteness…[but] are frequently attached to cute objects in the aesthetic realm."[140] In its aestheticized form, suspicion and violence "serve to critically reflect upon, rather than embody the subject's relation to cuteness."[141] Ultimately in agreement with Ngai about the masochistic pleasure of cute-kawaii affect, Dale attributes the discharge of aggressive affect not to an intuition of coerced consumption, but to the subject's sincere efforts "to preserve a vulnerable cute object."[142] Following Dale's understanding of cute-kawaii as affect, I nonetheless suggest that by describing the affect as fundamentally "benign," he inadvertently confirms Ngai's most major misconception. Both accounts assume a construction of innocence, in the specific form of what Alf Hornburg calls "The cultural assumption that material objects are politically innocent and immune to moral critique."[143]

Ngai's elaboration of the fantastical agency of objects, as Yano's in description of *kamikaze* Kitty, assumes the object is the passive vehicle for the psycho-drama of the consumer's desire. Acknowledged as "the site of a surprisingly complex power struggle"[144] the cute-*kawaii* thing does not participate beyond becoming a stage for the struggle between ideological apparatus and individualized psychological subjects. The "intrasubjective discord" endured in the cute experience is a form of guilty conscience in

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[140] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 36
[141] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Objects," 39
[142] Ibid.
[143] Homburg, "Submitting to Objects: Animism, Fetishism, and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism," 257
[144] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 11

which the consumer subject disavows their complicity in their own alienation from sensuous reality; the object serves only to reflect upon the disowned power of the subject. While Dale allows in his account of cute-*kawaii* as a domesticating affect a more complex interplay of human and nonhuman agencies, he retains with Ngai the belief that cuteness relies on and affirms a subject's power over an object. As we will see in the eroticized ideological innocence of the child, this assumption evacuates the object of its presence, empties it of the potential to defy figuration, or to exist independently of the subject (as the subject of ideological subjectification). The lack attributed to the object, the apparent lack of responsiveness an object *is*, stages and *produces* the determinant difference of the subject as agent. The presumed innocence of the object that relays the cute-*kawaii* commodity's innocent appearance results in two related misconceptions. The first is the explicit conflation of commodity form with cute-*kawaii* affect as what is done *to* objects in their commodification. The second is the implicit alignment of Ngai's argument with the ideological illusion of what Mark Fisher calls "Capitalist realism" through its suspicious orientation.

Related to, but distinct from Frederic Jameson's articulation of the cultural logic of postmodernism, Fisher introduces "capitalist realism" to delineate an acceleration of the logic of capitalism at the end of the 20th century in which we're threatened not by "the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their *precorporation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture."[145] It functions by a troping of 'the real,' in

[145] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 13

which an aesthetic realism's claim to "to have stripped the world of sentimental illusions," revealing it to be in actuality "a system of perpetual exploitation and generalized criminality," affirms that actuality as inescapable fact, reproducing global capitalism as an "anti-mythical myth."[146] Capitalist realism ensures "moral critique" of capitalism is disarmed in advance since the attempt to articulate the specific injustices and inequalities of global capitalism are assimilated into the generalized inevitability of suffering as *realism*. The realism of Ngai's account is a function of the rhetorical stance of critical suspicion, which aims to demythologize its object. However, in identifying the commodity form with the cute-*kawaii* thing Ngai precorporates the cute-kawaii experience into a totalizing model of capitalism as the Real. To rectify this it is first necessary to restore to things the possibility of guilt, of cunningly appearing innocently.

Hello Kitty is, for Christine Yano, "a pure commodity,"[147] in that the fetishism animating her image is entirely dissevered from any particular, material thing and its use-value. Personalizing the mass-produced objects she adheres to, her cute-kawaii innocence functions precisely according to Ngai's model of cute-kawaii by reaffirming the ideological illusion of the commodity's autonomous existence in exchange. However, her innocence reaffirms also the ideological illusion of the innocence of objects. Christine Yano notes the close association of Kitty with designer and "Mama" Yuko Yamaguchi gives Sanrio products the appearance of artisanship. Hello Kitty is able to personalize the commodity because she is prefigured as the specific object of individual human caring,

[146] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 14, 15
[147] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 10

endowed with meaning as the product of human labor. But the cute-*kawaii* affect of her design as the product of aestheticized labor is non-identical with the objects it appears on. While both the design and the object are sensuously cute and abstractly commodified, the interaction between these things in assemblage is not neatly reducible to their function within the assemblage.

Not merely rounded, an oval or circle like a child's cherubic face, the cute-*kawaii* is *circuitous*, charging through an *open* circuit, an ever-expansive gyre *en*circling whatever happens to be nearby—like a child with a crayon. In interviews, Yamaguchi appears in a flourish of fabrics and colors, as *kawaii* as her daughter-face. Kitty and "Mama" do not appear *as* each other, but *with* each other in what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "co-appearance." The cute-*kawaii* of Yamaguchi's artisanal design, the cute-*kawaii* of the branded commodities, and the cute-*kawaii* of Yamaguchi herself participate in, reinforce, and constitute one another in an "appearing that takes the place of and takes place in the position" of its constituents, making "every position, a dis-position," no longer identical with itself but identified with "the sense of *with...among...between*" itself and other positions. The co-appearance of artisanal Kitty and artisan Mama diffuses responsibility in a multiplicity of appearings-as-innocent that elicits and intensifies responsibility—consequently we should regard human and non-human aspects as responsible for each other.

If the innocent, dependent child is a "partial subject," cute commodities are what Latour describes as "quasi-objects." Not purely passive, but actively affecting, Hello Kitty substitutes her own, branded, sensuous cuteness for the physical qualities of the

object as it exists in relation to embodied consumers. Her appearance subsumes what the object is, or how it's used, and makes impossible the thinking of the object as other than its abstraction as a commodity. This is not the result of an ideological repression of the contradictory duality of abstract commodity and sensuous thing, as the fantasy of reclaimed use-value makes it appear. It is a formal legitimation of the contradiction. If "the very act by which different objects are set in equivalence with each other,"—exchange—"already presupposes difference as such," Hello Kitty's innocently appearing on an infinite variety of trinkets establishes, through the repetition of her singularized appearance, a formal equivalence between qualitatively different things.[148] She "intensifies" commodity fetishism not by recapitulating its logic, but absolving it in the appearance of artisanship. The objects she adorns are not passive victims of commodification, but perform it, naturalizing the disjunction between the material and the abstract, and affirming mass-production in the uncanny and identical repetitions of her mouthless face.

In affirming the abstraction of the commodity, cute-*kawaii* excuses consuming to excess, and is therefore strongly associated with the economic mode of consumption. For this reason Ngai conjectures the cute-*kawaii*'s "ultimate index...may be its edibility."[149] Nadia de Vries elaborates on this connection in her work on "cute consumables"—cute commodities stylized as food such as Sanrio's lassitudinous egg person *gudetama*. Cute-*kawaii* entails not only the subject's fantasy of the object's desire "to be consumed, to

[148] Jameson, *Representing Capital*, 18
[149] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 79

make itself useful," but also promises "in its most physical sense...a profound reconciliation with the object that is consumed."[150] The repeated failure of the cute commodity to be consumed in use "[coaxes] us into consuming more," and ensnares us in a kind of cruel optimism.[151] This exacerbating failure to consume is misconstrued by Ngai and de Vries as a failure to consume the cute-*kawaii* as such when it is a failure predicated on the abstracted nature of the commodity form. Cute-*kawaii* has been shown to generate an intense "approach motivation," a desire to "to fondle and squeeze"[152] its objects.

In children and pets this desire for nearness is also conventionally rendered as a desire to "consume," as when we say children are cute enough "to eat."[153] Hello Kitty can neither hug, be hugged, nor eaten because she is the ghost of a surplus value—she can only be consumed as a specter. Our relationships to our pets, food, and children are structured by capitalism, but to read these gestures and behaviors only "as an effort to 'grasp' the commodity as a product of concrete human labor,"[154] is to substitute the ""unsubstitutable singularities"[155] pets and children present, the vital necessities food and water are, with the abstraction of them as labor and exchange-value. Ngai's analysis of cuteness appears to affirm as real only the abstract form of the commodity, and consequently facilitates Hello Kitty's dissipation of the thing she masks. In relegating the desire to consume to its capitalist figuration Ngai unintentionally relinquishes to Hello

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[150] De Vries, "Under the Yolk of Consumption," 270
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 66
[153] Or when I lavish kisses upon a rat, and at the same time pantomime eating them like a hot dog.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 378

Kitty the power to define what "consumption" is: a specifically economic action performed by a uniquely agential subject without ethical regard for its relationship to the objects consumed.

The specifically economic meaning of 'consumption' as production's opposite has, as David Graeber notes, gradually come to contain "nearly anything [we] do when not working for wages," and the breadth of this definition conceals its historical inheritance.[156] Before it acquired its association with edibility, 'consumption' was used to describe overwhelming destruction: "To consume something meant to destroy it, to make it burn up, evaporate, or waste away."[157] Initially, then, consumption was a transitive verb, necessarily attached to a noun, and, as applied to persons, it denoted the passivity of being "consumed by" a disease, or an emotion. This meaning has specific resonances with the religious sphere, as the "consumption" of persons, animals, or things in sacrifice. Sacrificial destruction has been described by Rene Girard as a double substitution: the substitution of sacrificial for original "victim," and the substitution of individual victim for a whole community[158] Thus, "a sacrificial victim receives the deflected violence originally intended for the sacrificer."[159] Marcel Mauss associates sacrifice with the exchange of gits, where the "The purpose of destruction by sacrifice is precisely that it is an act of giving that is necessarily reciprocated," by other persons, spirits, or gods.[160] It is related also to ethical consumption of the edible, as Walter Burkert considers "the central,

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[156] Graeber, "The Very Idea of Consumption," 3
[157] Graeber, "The Very Idea of Consumption," 4
[158] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 102
[159] Kathryn MacClymand, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice*, 45
[160] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, 20

practical, and necessary act" of Greek sacrifice the killing of animals for food. Burkert thus describes sacrifice as a "comedy of innocence," in which "the killing of the animal, and man as its killer" arouses a "concern about the continuity of life…a respect for life as such, which prevents man from utterly destroying other beings in an autocratic way."[161]

Sacrificial consumption anticipates the experience of consumption in cuteness, in which the cutifier is cutified by a seemingly autonomous exchange of properties, and suffers an indeterminacy of power, violence, innocence, and dependency in their relation. The things typically sacrificed were "innocents"—children, animals, and objects—and the sacrifice performatively establishes the innocence of the act, and the actor. Both sacrificial and edible entail an identification between subject and object that involves the potential transmutation of the object into the subject, and vice-versa, but also the interdependence of subject and object that necessitates either the subject's or the object's destruction (from starvation, from consumption). "Sacrifice" thus denotes a consumption of things by persons which entails an ontological indebtedness and forms an ethical relation between human and other beings. Recalling a Teddy Bear inspired ethics "does not teach concern for others," but "makes it impossible to say whether the object is inside or outside the subject," the consumability of the cute-*kawaii* suggests an ethos not of deontological duty, but an existential vulnerability of dependency, of the sort that makes sacred cows (in both senses).

It became possible to understand "consumption" as the economic activity of individuals only through the chained emergence of Cartesian dualism and, following it in

[161] Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 106

the next century, the reconfiguration of the social into discrete spheres of labor and recreation by the Industrial Revolution.[162] While the latter forged the economic connection, Descartes' formulation of subject-object dualism instantiates the "innocence" of objects as merely material properties, "uncontaminated by symbolic meanings or social relations." Objects are thus free to be imposed upon by their subject-owners, who suffer "a kind of moral or emotional dissociation from that part of reality classified as object,"[163] occasionally affirmed through physical violence as when "early European vivisectionists...felt compelled to sever the vocal cords of the dogs whose living anatomy they explored,"[164] effectively doubling the animal-object's conditional abjection from communication. This makes possible the kind of property relation which now defines consumption as a combination of personal "identification" or "belonging" with the object, exclusive "access to, or control," of the object, and complete "sovereignty" over the object, including *the right* to destroy it, which entails no ethical obligations.[165] In soliciting their own consumption, cute commodities promote and naturalize this economic mode almost exactly as Ngai describes, but significantly they retain elements of sacrificial consumption in their displacement of the object they adorn. Importantly, Hello Kitty is the *sacrificer* that supplicates, through the sacrifice of the material object, the consumer.

The thingly presence Kitty superimposes upon and substitutes for the physical

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[162] Graeber, "The Very Idea of Consumption," 5
[163] Hornborg, "Submitting to Objects: Animism, Fetishism, and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism," 246
[164] Hornborg, "Submitting to Objects: Animism, Fetishism, and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism," 47
[165] Graeber, "The Very Idea of Consumption," 23

thing she comprises makes *innocent* the consumer's own consumption of that material. Hello Kitty's appearing innocent is not merely the subject's projection, but a performance facilitated by the 'artisanal' quality of design that causes her to appear as already endowed with human meaning as in the practice of sacrifice (of labor, resources). Figuring consumption as an economic act of the subject is to make them complicit in the consumption that has always already occurred in an encounter with Hello Kitty: the exploitative, excessive extraction of labor and resources by capitalism, upon which we appear to depend. Hello Kitty consumes, through her presence, the physical properties of the thing she's present through such that its abstraction *as* commodity, as exchange-value, is foregrounded as the real thing, rather the use-value of the thing itself. In floating above her material embodiments Hello Kitty innocently seems to evacuate consumption of the "critical," or ethical potential of consumption *as* sacrifice. That is, consumption's indexing of a fundamental relation between making, using, and *destroying* something that is ineluctably singular and sensuous, and the capacity of things to affect us in the destruction of their sensuous singularity.[166] The relationship of cute-kawaii and consumption, I suggest, is more closely allied with their etymological meanings: "consumption," as both to incorporate by eating, *and* to indiscriminately, overwhelmingly destroy subjects/objects; "cute," as canny, cutting.

The fantasy of Kitty is therefore not about the object's specificity or use-value. Rather, her innocent playfulness induces "a state of irresponsibility" in which the

[166] Hornborg, "Submitting to Objects: Animism, Fetishism, and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism," 256

material substrate of her aesthetic form appears *not to be* consumed in its production as *Hello Kitty*. This is facilitated by an infrastructure of globalization that distances "production from reproduction and consumption," and "leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat, wear, or work with have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded."[167] The interrelated appearings-as of Mama, Kitty, and Kitty objects together produce what Mark Fisher describes as a "negative hallucination," a failure to perceive what is present in which "objects are registered, but not seen."[168] Not "a gap that is perceived and felt" in consciousness, negative hallucination functions as "a gap which conceals itself,[169] an "involuntary process of overlooking material which contradicts dominant stories we tell ourselves" in order to preserve coherent identity.[170] Fisher's example is the "heavy material infrastructure" of a shipping port, which despite its massy immensity, "facilitates the illusion of a 'de-materialized' capitalism."[171] The port enables and conceals capitalism's continued reliance on exploited human labor, causing the foreign worker's body to disappear as a function of the port's appearing as "the triumph of finance capital."[172] Artisanal embodiments of cute-*kawaii*, Hello Kitty commodities appear worldwide as the disappearance of the fact that "ocean-liners...ship the commodified embodiments of labor."[173] The fantasy of commodity cute-*kawaii* is of an

[167] Sylvia Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World*, 109
[168] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 74
[169] Ibid.
[170] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 75
[171] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 77
[172] Ibid.
[173] Hornborg, "Submitting to Objects," 257

endless consumption, a pure and idealized consumption, without mess, which enables endless exploitation, and is enabled by its total abstraction from the material world. Hello Kitty's mouthlessness marks not just her muteness, then, but also her inability to eat and to defecate—a total exemption from the living cycle of production-reproduction-consumption.

It does not follow from this that Hello Kitty and/as the commodity form is *not* cute. She is only able to execute her designs by virtue of a sincere cuteness, by prompting a response that "*narrows the field of attention*,"[174] and displaces what embodies her, designating her as the thing we ought to desire to consume. However, the cute-*kawaii* of Hello Kitty's commodity form is independent of both her cute-kawaii design and her embodiment as particular cute things. Inasmuch as cute-kawaii "narrows" our attention to the cute object, the profligacy that circulates the cute-*kawaii* through illimitable things also blurs boundaries between objects. The oft discussed squishiness of the cute-kawaii provides a model for thinking both "narrowing," and "embracing." It's a kind of smushing by compaction. Consumption—as incorporation and ritual destruction—also indexes this effect. Hello Kitty's consumptive powers assimilate her materials to her design and a brand in the same way as what is eaten is incorporated, and what is sacrificed is sacralized. The destruction and absorption of the object appears as necessary to sustain an amorphous totality of relations. Thus, for Ngai, "the epitome of cute would be an undifferentiated blob of soft doughy matter…since soft contours suggest pliancy or responsiveness to the will of others," and the gooey lack of differentiation in "the

[174] Nittano, qtd. Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 46

experience of soft...squishiness that is cuteness" is tainted by a fear and disgust is linked to the equivocations of capital in "the 'congealed' mass of homogenous labor."[175]

In German, Ngai notes, Marx figures the "congealed quantities" of undifferentiated labor as *Gallerte*, a "semisolid, tremulous mass" made by boiling together and then cooling any "animal substances that yield glue...meat, bone, connective tissue, stag horns."[176] In the figure of *Gallerte's* (in)edibility the phantom of disgust Ngai detects in the cute-kawaii emerges as actual disgust. But, as Sara Ahmed observes, objects are not inherently disgusting, not even slimy, sticky, deliquescent ones. Glue, she argues, "is hardly a substance that is represented as disgusting," despite its globularity. Ahmed theorizes this is because glue is "something we use to stick other things together," and "stickiness becomes disgusting only when...what is sticky threatens to stick to us" —that is, when the object appears to act *on* the subject.[177] Furthermore, "as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs," what appears to disgust is implicated in the history of what has been figured disgustingly. Repetition "binds" disgust to certain bodies, objects, and signs (generating those things as other-than-the-subject), as well as "blocks" them from "moving or acquiring new value."[178] In establishing a determinant difference between unsoiled subject (object) and impure object (subject), like a negative hallucination then, disgust aspires to halt a play of *différance* that risks decentering the subject.

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[175] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 27, 64, 67
[176] qtd. Sutherland 7
[177] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 90
[178] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92

In her invocation of Marx's *gallerte* as a figure of the cute-kawaii's proximity to disgust, Ngai generates the cute-kawaii *as* an object of disgust at the same time she precludes the possibility of the *gallerte*'s becoming cute—its appearing innocently as a thing with which we desire intimate acquaintance. As Keston Sutherland notes, "Marx's German readers will not only have bought *Gallerte*, they will have eaten it."[179] *Gallerte* was consumed not just as a commodity, but intimately incorporated into the laborer's body. It was a familiar, domestic thing. While Marx's figuration *was* intended to disgust his readers, Sutherland's elaboration of the *Gallerte*'*s* rhetorical function suggests that its capacity to disgust does not emerge from its wobbly, squishy consistency. Instead, Marx inverts the figure of edibility. In framing the undifferentiation of labor as the gelatinous residuum of animal parts to be consumed by the reader, Marx makes viscerally understood that "The living hands, brains, muscles and nerves of the wage laborer are mere "animal substances," ingredients at the feast of the capitalist...The worker who starts out a real body and brain is reduced to Gallerte through submission." (Sutherland 8). The figure of the *gallerte* seems thus to involve the kind of transversal identifications as a cute-*kawaii* sacrifice: the worker is *like* the *gallerte*, and like the animals consumed in its making, and the *gallerte* becomes the worker through its consumption. Although it arouses disgust as the image of the commodification of labor, it is also charged with a kind of *pathos*, a seeming pathetic that solicits the reader's caring responsiveness—a willingness to see the *gallerte*, if not as themselves, then as an object of concern with which they are intimately, bodily, related. If Hello Kitty's cuteness comprises the "acute"

[179] Sutherland, "," 7

as shrewdness, to see the *Gallerte* as cute is to recognize the potential of cute-kawaii to be cutting, to sting us with *pathos*. To freeze the figure of the *gallerte* as purely "congealed," as an object of disgust, is to block this empathetic responsiveness.

For Simon May it is only when "we fuse these two distinct definitions"—acute/shrewd on the one hand, cute/naive on the other—that "we begin to do justice to Cute's fuller meaning: to, precisely, its ambivalences. Innocent cunning. Cunning innocence."[180] (May 39). Accordingly, the vacillation between intimacy and distance, danger and domesticity, power and powerlessness is not merely a reflection of particular historical circumstances but an index of a human potential for a particular kind of intensity obtaining in an experience of indeterminacy, or, to borrow May's neologism, "unpindownability." Thus the possibility that "[Cute] is aware of the horrors of the world..[and] to an extent it embodies them," as in the simultaneity of the acute and the cute of Hello Kitty, the *Gallerte*, and the Yellow Kid. Nonetheless, the cute-kawaii "doesn't look to morality to do anything about them," (May 48). That is, cuteness is physically aware of or *attuned to* injustices and may be directly formed by them, but appears incapable or unwilling to strategize against them, is able only to unreadably gesture by burning the dogcatcher's wagon. Following May's formulation of cute-kawaii as the indeterminacy of "innocent cunning," I adjoin it with Joshua Paul Dale's understanding of cuteness as an appeal in order to articulate the interstices of cute-*kawaii* affect and affect as such.

A "performative act expressing affinity," Dale writes, ""Cuteness may be best

[180] Simon May, *The Power of Cute*, 29

understood as an *appeal*—intentional or unconscious—that *seeks to trigger* a particular affective response."[181] As an 'expression of affinity,' the formlessness of cute-kawaii comes to the fore. Its "expression" remains "expressionless" because it lacks *any* definite formal qualities delimiting the circuit of communication. Thus, Dale's phrasing draws attention to the indeterminacy of intentionality in the communication of cute-kawaii: independent of the will of a subject *and* the phenomenal qualities of an object, the cute-kawaii appeal *itself* seems to "seek" its reception. Taking the form of a wink, or the implied innocence of a blush, or the floppy ears of domesticated canids, the only sure marker of cute-*kawaii*, for Dale, is the feeling of being affected by it. Its appeal thus functions as an "invitation to sociality that we respond to *as if it were an act of agency*," while our response to it is "a process in which one discovers oneself *already drawn into* the orbit of a loveable and intimate other."[182]

Intentionality, in the experience of cute-kawaii, erodes to intensity. Neither subject nor object of the experience can claim use of free will or rational faculty; each can only respond indexically to the experience itself. It is intentionality understood in the narrower technical, and semantically broader sense of sense of a phenomenological "feeling about something"[183]—perhaps how it feels about you. The acuity of the cute-kawaii here is not one which is absented, or displaced but is central to the response as that which signifies the response has occurred or is occurring *between* us and the world. Defined thus as an intense affective response (or an intense responsiveness to affect)

[181] Dale, "Introduction," 4
[182] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 52
[183] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*,

cute-kawaii is continuous with a meaning of 'acute,' dating from the 18th century: "Of feelings, pains, etc., *'intense.'*"[184] It appears then that cute-kawaii is definitionally entangled with affect as a font of intensities and movements, and with the piercing impingement of affect-experience prior to resolution as legible expression *of* discrete subjects in reference *to* discernible objects. It is a mode of linguistically ungraspable *becoming within the presence of another* that, because it appeals to our interrelated affective responsiveness, is unassimilable as the property of a discrete and unified agential subject. It obtains in the aporia between being affectively *present with* and *being present as* a determinant concept in language.

Accordingly, the aphaeresis of 'acute' is identical to rather than distinct from other examples of the phenomenon. When 'until' becomes 'til,' or 'alone' becomes 'lone,' and *kawayushi* becomes *kawaii* they transform into "shorter, cuter" versions of themselves.[185] However, the process by which these words become 'cuter' also makes them more intense. To be 'alone' implies a transitory condition while being 'lone' implies a continuous state of being; to wait 'until' the appointed time implies temporal extension, but to wait 'til' implies that our temporal extension is so unbearable we cannot wait to finish the word. To be 'cute' is, paradoxically, to be more intensely 'acute' than acuity entails. Rather than an 'uncanny reversal' the aphaeresis undergone by 'acute' to become 'cute' should be understood as the second order generation of concepts as the recursion, a kind of exaggeration *and* repression—uncanny in its own way. In becoming

[184] "Acute," https://www.etymonline.com/word/acute
[185] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 87

a legible aesthetic category the acuity intrinsic to the cute-kawaii is eclipsed by the conventional visual markers of cute-kawaii aesthetics, which, capable of being cute-kawaii *in themselves*, exacerbate the intensity of the experience at the same time they delimit its association to those markers, becoming 'blocked,' in Ahmed's phrasing, by the figurations of Hello Kitty or Mickey Mouse. The "capture" of cute-kawaii affect by the formalized figurization of brand mascots results in the refiguration of an ambivalent acuity as obsequious sweetness, the transformation of an expressionless, impersonal "happening," into the objectified expression of "happiness."[186]

I suggest that the coincidence of disgust, suspicion, and the cute in Ngai's analysis is structured by the preexisting formal and generic practices that designate "demystification" as the mode of apprehending the real, and the "rational subject" as the agent of demystification.[187] Ngai's "response" to the cute-kawaii is embedded in her responsibility to a particular style of academic rhetoric that values " an objective account of an argument with textual demonstrations, and…[evaluates it] on its own terms as well as by the standards of an impartial judgment."[188] This is a form of responsibility, Spivak argues, that can "[annul] the call to which it seeks to respond" by refusing contaminant contact with what "resists thought."[189] Ngai's description of cute-kawaii as the "intensification of commodity fetishism," parallels Sara Ahmed's description of disgust as an "intensification of movement as such." Disgusted by something (we desire), we

[186] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 30
[187] This presupposes former object of mystification
[188] Gayatri Spivak, "Responsibility," 19
[189] Ibid.

experience "a pulling that feels almost involuntary, as if our bodies were thinking for us...objects seem to have us 'in their grip'...to be moving towards us," and so *we* "pull away, with an urgency that can be undoing."[190] In both cases the subject experiences an initial desire for proximity, which appears to issue *from* the thing itself, and this desire is superseded by a gestural distancing. In Ngai's argument, I conjecture the "subject" itself as a category of being (human) is a mode of distancing from the ontic acuity of the cute-kawaii, which resists being *thought of* as ontologically external, inert, or other (than human) in its insistent, expressionless, appeal for response.

"Everything [being] in play in the distinction between reaction and response," I nonetheless attempt to trace a permeable difference in order to articulate a cute-kawaii ethics.[191] In his discussion of "reaction" and "response" Derrida suggests their principle use in the history of philosophy has been to demarcate between the free and rational human subject, and the mindless, mechanical world of non-human being. Descartes' *Discourse on Methods*, Derrida argues, passingly theorizes the animal as a being whose suffering cannot be sufficiently distinguished from the imitation of suffering by an advanced automaton. Incapable of "responding" to our call, naming its suffering, the animal is assumed to react mechanically to circumstance. This "objectivizing staging of the animal of theory" appears, to Derrida, as the grounds for indifference to the ethical possibility of an "animal that sees me see it," in response to the suffering of which we may feel responsible.[192] Although both reaction and response embed a grammatical

[190] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 84
[191] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 81
[192] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 66, 81, 82

subject within the circuit of an event-experience; and both necessarily refer to another grammatical subject (of another sentence, or a clause); and both subjects are potentially persons or things; "reaction" may be distinguished from "response" on the grounds that "to react" closes a circuit (of action, of being), while "to respond" leaves it open. "To react" to something, implies 1) a relationship between more or less objective, material forces, as in the case of a chemical reaction, and 2) the reformation of the object of an external force as the subject exercising an opposing force. In each case the verb signals a closure that forms a determinant difference between actors, at the very least *in time* (since to *re*act implies a linear temporalization). Ngai's analysis in the mode of demythologizing figures the cute-kawaii, and her disgust, as *reactions* to impersonal, ideological forces.

Responsibility, for Spivak, cannot be "thought" without also thinking "contamination," precisely because to "be responsible" requires an openness to the call of the "radically other which cannot even (have or) be a face," a call that may only "[seem] to us to resemble a call...that cannot be grasped as such."[193] The call is unreadable, expressionless, and must necessarily be so since to be responsible to what can be expressed as a subject's "duty" to a state, a society, a family, a self, a paradigm is to disavow a relatedness of being present with another. Donna Harraway's parallel theory of "response-ability," takes Hannah Arendt's Eichmann as its example of the irresponsible: "[Eichmann] was a human being unable to make present to himself...what was not himself...the world in its sheer not-one-selfness…duty mattered, but the world did not

[193] Spivak, "Responsibility," 21, 22, 23

matter."[194] The ethical failure of Eichmann, for Harraway, is not one of emotional capacity or intellectual understanding, but resignation to an "immateriality, inconsequentiality," she terms "thoughtlessness."[195] which counterintuitively parallel to what Spivak describes as the refusal to "[give] permission to be approached by that which most resists thought."[196] What "resists thought" is, in my understanding, also that which resists "thoughtlessness," a presence to what Adorno describes as the "nonidentity" of objects with their concepts, the ontic residuum of things ontologically figured as objects. As Jane Bennett describes it, "nonidentity is a presence that acts upon us: we knowers are haunted...by a painful, nagging feeling that something's being forgotten or left out."[197] To see a cockroach as a figure of disgust is to resist thinking the cockroach as being entangled with us, ecologically, materially, and *responsively*; to *forget* ahead of time the possibility of a cockroach's being something beyond disgusting—a playmate, a mother, a snack, an earthling, an innocent.

It is because what is non-identical with our thought of another is radically heterogenous that, for Spivak, the response of response-ability "involves not only "respond to," as in "give an answer to," but also the related situations of "answering to,"...being responsible for a name," and, "when it is possible for the other to be face-to-face, the task and lesson of attending to her response so that it can draw forth one's own."[198] In contrast to the closure of reaction, Spivak describes the dynamics of

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[194] Harraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, 36
[195] Harraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, 21, 36
[196] Spivak, "Responsibility,"
[197] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 14
[198] Spivak, "Responsibility," 22

response-ability as the "supplementary labor" of "terrifying contamination," that is "caught in a question necessarily begged in action...attending to the call of that irreducible fact."[199] This is echoed by Harraway's argument that "to know and to cultivate the capacity of response-ability…[is] to be present in and to onrushing catastrophe in time."[200] To respond to another means to be present to the possibility of its being other than we thought, to not know ahead of time what will be called out by the other, or what we will respond with because the form of the response must supplement the other's call. In "Response to Jean-Luc Nancy" Spivak elaborates the capacity to respond through "concentration."[201]

The "supplementary spirit" is marked by a "narrowing, circling effort," of "transformative attention to the other" united with "obstinate acknowledgment of the context."[202] The circle, paradigmatic shape of the cute-kawaii, is also figured as the form of ethically "concentrated" attention, the supplementary labor that transfigures unknowable other into intimate other as that which transforms—touches, moves—the subject. "The encircling form," of acute concentration resonates with the embrace "of the...arms, offering the child sanctuary."[203] Film scholar David Whitley argues, quoting Bachelard, the figure of the hug is "reminiscent of…the space of the nest…the "origin of confidence in the world ... an urge towards cosmic confidence"[204] comparable with the

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[199] Spivak, "Responsibility," 26
[200] Harraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, 35
[201] A word that arrives through Derrida's reading of Paul Celan, "concentration" is doubled as the immaterial activity of subjects, and the material presence of othered bodies in concentration camps.
[202] Spivak, "Response to Jon-Luc Nancy," 45
[203] Whitley, "," 86
[204] Ibid.

"naive unity with the world" Kinsella attributes to the cute-*kawaii*. As such it shares the supplementarity of acute concentration as a gesture towards what escapes, and yet enables, the intimate form of the embrace—a concentric series of encircling forms that express nothing but their thereness with others. As "supplement" we can follow responsibility back to disgust and the cute. If, as Sara Ahmed argues, the figures of disgust halt the chain of signification, it is to avoid what Eugenie Brinkema describes as "the opening up of the worse than the worst."[205]

Disgust's relation to "the absolutely excluded," involves a commitment to structural "overflow" a "supplementarity" in which "the things of the world become unbound from their...qualities."[206] This is the structure of "putrescence," the dissolution of form as the multiply interacting partial parts of the half-digested, half-known. This is not, Brinkema is clear, "an immediate experience of a totality," the absorption of the world into the figure of disgust, but a "drive to proliferate lists of qualities," which requires "reading" what is present beyond what can be represented as the disgusting object: not the vomit itself but what *might* have been an apple peel. Despite its aesthetic associations with unsoiled innocence, as affect, cute-kawaii has a relation to a desire to *be* contaminated, to read disgust. It recognizes a contamination already in process in the ambiguity of appearing innocently *with* other things. Importantly, cute-kawaii *does not* humanize the disgusting, or neutralize it. To scrub a cute rat's cage clean of feces is to engage with what disgusts me as an aspect of an intimacy. Cute-kawaii "supplements"

[205] Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 144
[206] Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 144, 156

the disgusting by causing "the worse than the worst" to appear an Other that "I," intimately and of necessity, *am* with.

Rather than "congealing," we might term its dissolution of boundaries "composting," a return of the absolutely excluded as the absolutely necessary—recognition of responsibility to the blameless necessity of waste as the expressionless facticity of another. Pets are "unsubstitutable singularities", before even being identified as animals. According to Derrida, they are present to us as an "irreplaceable living being", whose being intersects, occasionally with our own.[207] The question of our having power over our pets then, before it can be resolved, must traverse from the general singular figure of the 'cute' animal to the particularity of 'cute' animality present in each encounter. Is the animal being made to respond to or are we engaged in a mutual responsiveness? Is the domestication conciliatory or assimilative? What is at play, and what is at stake in our play? What is signified is the capacity to signify. That is, the possibility of meaningful interactivity between subject-objects.

Ngai is not wrong to be suspicious of how cuteness affects commodities and consumers, but generalizing a model of cute-kawaii as the commodity mask of capitalism's acuteness affixes the cute and affirms an inevitable capitalism. To respond to the appeal of the cute-kawaii is to risk contingency and contamination, to not know ahead of the response what mode of relating we're in, or whether what appears innocently is in fact innocent. Aversion may be reasonable, but refusing to be contaminated by the cute-kawaii carries the threat of irresponsibility—of failing to respond to the appeal of what

[207] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 378

appears, either the worker in the *gallerte*, or the louse-infested child in the slums. Accordingly, the acute is continuous with rather than distinct from cute-kawaii affect, precisely in its paradoxical encompassing of both the innocent and the contaminating. It permeates blamelessly, or is blamelessly permeated in a process of mutual becoming.

CHAPTER TWO

PROFLIGATE AS AN IRISH RAT: CUTE-*KAWAII'S* PROTEAN STYLE AND APPEARING AS SUFFERING

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Studies of the cute and *kawaii* have predominantly focused on the apparent tension between a cute-*kawaii* thing's evident weakness, and its powerful injunction to care for (or consume) it. However, by centering discussions of cute-*kawaii* on its apparent oscillations between power and powerlessness, its capacity to oscillate between ontological categories more broadly has been obfuscated. Describing the "profligacy" of the cute-*kawaii* Christine Yano writes, "Theoretically anything may be made cute—that is, rendered innocent, playful, guileless, appealing, and ultimately marketable."[208] She follows Anne Allison in interpreting the figures of post-war *kawaii* within "the esoteric spirit of Buddhist *henshin* (transformation)."[209][210] Centered on its profligacy, I argue, cute-*kawaii* appears as a recursion of the processes of affectation, affection, and stylization—naming a coming to appear as *styled*, styled *as* significant or *signifying*, Recalling Neer's definition of style as an "appearing-as" this results in what appears as a tautology: that the cute-*kawaii* is an appearing-as as if appearing-as. However, questions of style or of being stylized always implicitly involve questions of intention, agency, and the human. The acute appeal of the cute-*kawaii* thing is an effect of its coming to appear as style, and simultaneously style's coming to appear as a mark of the human. This

[208] Christine Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 22
[209] Ibid.
[210] Allison, *Millennial Monsters*, 43, 148

involves shifting registers between being, seeming, appearing, and feeling human, as the cute-*kawaii* thing comes to be regarded as a member of a "moral circle."

Significantly, the transformative capacity of the cute-*kawaii* is "reciprocal rather than one-way."[211] The profligacy of the cute-*kawaii* is not only the capacity of a cute-*kawaii* thing to be transformed, but additionally to transform how things appear in relation to itself, which is to say to transform the meanings of things in general as concerns their humanities. Cute-*kawaii* profligacy presents the possibility of appearing human as the possibility of appearing in a myriad human *styles*, affectively charged out of its abstraction. Everything becomes absolutely fungible, and at the same time absolutely singular in the ontological oscillations between material and semiotic, suffering and senselessness. Thus, the power of cute-*kawaii* things possibly resists the rationalizing, abstractive, and quantitative logic of mass produced commodities in exchange, a logic of classification, evaluation, and instrumentalization also undergirding 19th and 20th century colonial and white supremacist ideologies. This potential will be brought to the fore in the palimpsestic accumulation of contingent meanings on the surface of the word, the figure, and the animal "rat" as it appears in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and other places. What following "that rat" (Joyce's rat), the word "rat," live rats, and my rats will demonstrate is that profligacy makes possible one "utopian potential" of cute-*kawaii*: a valuation of the "interactions with a cute entity and its singular set of phenomenal qualities" that resists the alienating logics of modernity.[212] Before we meander through

[211] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 42
[212] Arkenburg, "Cuteness and Control in *Portal*, 70

Joyce, however, it is necessary to malinger in the definitional vortices of cute-*kawaii* power.

Despite decoupling the cute-*kawaii* from a strictly literal *kinderschema*, the influence of the model persists, and the critical understanding of the cute-kawaii generally remains as an aestheticization and eroticization of particularly childlike powerlessness. The association of cute-*kawaii* with a caretaker-child dyad makes legible the most recognized set of cute-*kawaii* tropes, including "smallness, compactness, formal simplicity, softness or pliancy...helplessness, pitifulness...despondency,"[213] 'intimacy', 'familiarity', 'friendship,'"[214] "weakness and disability," such that the cute-*kawaii* thing "can't walk, can't talk, can't in fact do anything at all for themselves," and "acting stupid."[215]Because the aesthetic of cute-*kawaii* has been deployed, as noted, by corporate and state institutions as a "a method of appearing non-threatening, thereby gaining...confidence, and perhaps more cynically, control,"[216] I do not want to understate the "charges of infantilism" against the cute-*kawaii* as it appears as "legitimizing by aestheticizing *a saying no to political power*"[217] within a gendered and globalized capitalist mass culture. However, I maintain the vulnerability it indexes is not reducible to "the domination and...humiliation of others,"[218] and that further consideration is due to what kind of power cute-*kawaii* designates prior to its becoming attached to other forms and sites of power.

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[213] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 65
[214] McVeigh, *Wearing Ideology*, 239
[215] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 236-238
[216] Brian McVeigh, *Wearing Ideology*, 143
[217] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 69
[218] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 18

Although, according to Ngai, "there is no judgment or experience of an object as cute that does not call up one's sense of power over it as something less powerful," its powerlessness appears to vacillate since the cute-*kawaii* object nonetheless "makes demands" of us, makes an injunction or an appeal.[219] Building on Ngai, Christine Yano argues that the weakness of the cute-*kawaii* "is more complex than a strict dichotomy between the powerful and powerless." Instead, she suggests that the cute-*kawaii* describes "a particular gaze upon the world," one that is "charged with empathy, intimacy, and emotion," and that "establishes a relational position of the gazer and the gazed-upon," whatever the gazed upon may be[220]. The affection / affectation of the cute-*kawaii*, she suggests, are better invoked by the Japanese concept of *amae* (dependency). While it too is rooted in a "prototypical child-mother dyad," Christine Yano suggests that *amae* more generally indexes "relationality," the "ongoing connections between one person and others, as well as with objects," and that it is this broader web of interdependency which links "the cute and the vulnerable."[221] While not intrinsic to *amae*, the emphasis the concept places on dependence as an aspect of cute-*kawaii* vulnerability usefully translates into my understanding of cute-*kawaii* vulnerability as related to a contingency of meaning, of meaning to mean to human beings.

Simon May more radically enjoins us to consider cute-*kawaii* "a nascent will to repudiate the ordering of human relations by power, or at least to question our

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[219] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 11
[220] Yano, *Pink Globalization,* 57
[221] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 56

assumptions about who has power and to what end."[222] He posits that the cute-*kawaii* "celebrates vulnerability, rescuing it from the margins of society or consciousness and placing it, protectively, in the mainstream," but this appears to me an unsatisfactory response to its critics.[223] In fact, his figuration of the cute-*kawaii* solution is uncannily anticipated by Ngai's characterization of the cute-*kawaii*'s "solution of the problem of power" as "'to make everybody 'like unto little children'"—since this "is not such a bad way...of disposing of them."[224] Rather than figuratively childlike in its vulnerability, I propose the cute-*kawaii* describes an experience the figurative child is uniquely vulnerable to. "Suspicious of the simple opposition of *dominant* and *dominated*, or even the final determination of the forces in conflict, or even, more radically, of the idea that force is always stronger than weakness,"[225] I contend that the cute-*kawaii's* power to appear "playfully vulnerable"[226] should not be understood as a "power" in the sense of a capacity to destroy, to dominate, or to determine life or death, but rather power in the sense of the potential to be destroyed, dominated, and to live or die—the potentiality of "being able to suffer."[227] A potentiality that is directly linked to the interdependence—we might merely say dependence—of the myriad parts of the human/non-human dyad through chains of rearing, killing, eating, and fertilizing.

In this light, cute-*kawaii* appears as what Derrida describes as "a possibility

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[222] May, *The Power of Cute*, 9
[223] May, *The Power of Cute*, 153
[224] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 69
[225] Derrida, *Specters of Marx,* 55
[226] May, *The Power of Cute*, 9
[227] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 396

without power." [228] Suffering, the "non-power at the heart of power" refers to both the capacity to be affected by pain, and the capacity to be affected in *general*—the human power to suffer experiences. Rather than an "eroticization of powerlessness" we might describe cute-*kawaii* as the "appearance of human suffering." More specifically, we might say it is a style of human suffering-experience described by *amae*: dependency, or interrelationality. As it relates to relationality and power, Joshua Paul Dale has articulated the cute-*kawaii* as a power which takes the form of a "performative act expressing affinity."[229] Although he follows Ngai assessment of American cuteness as ambivalent in its relationship to power, Dale suggests that Ngai overestimates the role power *as such* plays in the aesthetic response of cute-*kawaii*. While "the vacillation of power staged by cuteness" remains "key...to the pleasures of many forms of cute-content"[230] in his understanding, it is complicated by "the 'aww' factor,"[231] a "physical response triggered by cute affect," which "effectively disarms the subject and imposes an imperative against harming the cute object."[232] Accordingly, Dale argues that the vulnerability "cuteness may be best understood as an *appeal*—intentional or unconscious—that *seeks to trigger* a particular affective response."[233] Aimed "at disarming aggression and promoting sociality" by heightening "emotional reactivity," the cute-*kawaii* encourages "cooperative play" and "companionship/friendship."[234]

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[228] Ibid.
[229] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 52
[230] Dale, "Introduction", 9
[231] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 35
[232] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 40
[233] Dale, "Introduction", 4
[234] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 36

Dale posits one function of this appeal is to demarcate a limit between play violence and real violence—as when a nipping pup prompts a plaintive yip from her sister—what I would describe as making legible what *appears as* suffering in relation to others—what appears as another's *style* of experiencing as suffering, and the commutability of that style to the self. Derrida also links the capacity to "appeal" to prosociality. For him the "appeal," exceeds a mere "ethical and political imperative." It is *the* "political injunction...the promise...the originary performativity…whose force of *rupture* produces the law itself...the meaning that appears to, that ought to, or that appears to have to guarantee it in return."[235] "Appearing," and only appearing, "to have to guarantee...in return" the power of the appeal describes exactly the rat that comes when its name is called, in that it moves through a communicative, but informal circuit. If the rat responds to the call it is not because it can be assured of receiving a treat *in language*, the subject of a formal contract. Rather, there is an open-ended exchange of signs in which it is taught to associate the sound of its name with the promise of food, and its person is taught to associate the rat's curling up into his lap with incurring the debt of a treat.

The form of the appeal to see-as-suffering-from-experience is unfixed, and for Derrida it must be unfixed to function as an appeal. To fix the form of the appeal risks resting "on the good conscience of having done one's duty,"[236] and forecloses the possibility of responding to an appeal that appears as another. While Dale leans on the

[235] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 31
[236] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 28

kinderschema in order to articulate a theory of cute-*kawaii* appeal as an affect of domestication, he nonetheless makes central to it an openness to the possibility of transformation. Linking cute-*kawaii* to a genetic predisposition to tameness, he recounts a series of breeding experiments done with Siberian silver foxes. Mating the foxes friendliest to humans, Russian scientists soon produced a generation of foxes morphologically analogous to domesticated dogs, "showing a high prevalence of floppy ears, curly tails, and piebald coats."[237] As in dogs, these physiological changes appear to correspond to an extended period of immaturity as opposed to their wild counterparts. Behavioral changes also appeared. In addition to "tail-wagging, whining, and licking," the foxes displayed a new aptitude for "comprehending human gestures," and were able to "follow a pointed finger to locate hidden food."[238] It is tempting to view the experiment as evidence of cute-*kawaii* as an imposed infantilism, but Dale notes that it supports current work regarding the "self-domestication" of dogs, a theory which proposes that human friendly dogs self-selected themselves to approach humans in the pursuit of table scraps, body heat, and other survival needs.[239]

Consequently, cute-*kawaii* appears not as a human practice of manipulating the animal form, but as the animal transforming the form of human practice, introducing itself to language. Appearing alongside human beings the dog (the cat, the hog, and the rat) demand to be called by name, come to appear as what is named that, and go on to give to human beings names for "mongrel" ("pussy," "butcher," or "exterminator").

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[237] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 48
[238] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 49
[239] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 47

Because it is a process of coevolution, it is not possible to identify an essential form of cute-*kawaii* even if all present examples converge. It is possible to imagine an adorable future form of the spider dozing at the foot of the bed, even if it cannot be pictured quite yet. Because it is a process of coevolution, furthermore, Dale suggests the possibility that human beings suffer from self-domestication themselves, self-selecting for the same prosocial characteristics. Although Dale refers to human beings as "products" of this process we should note that our own evolution is open-ended and ongoing. The future cute-*kawaii* appeal might appear as a rakish, toothy wink, or the implied innocence of a blush, or the floppy ears of domesticated arachnids. The only sure marker of cute-kawaii, for Dale, is the feeling of cute-kawaii, of being affected by it. Its appeal thus functions as an "invitation to sociality that we respond to as if," and only *as if*, "it were an act of agency," while our response to it is "a process in which one discovers oneself already drawn into the orbit of a loveable and intimate other."[240]

Thus for Dale the "vacillations of power" that appear to inhere to cute-*kawaii* are one aspect of its involvement in the creation and transformation of a relation that creates and transforms its members. Because "our own desire to engage with it dictates the terms of the encounter"[241] with cute-*kawaii*, we find ourselves also "altering under the pressure to preserve that object and [our] bond with it."[242] As Dale writes, "the intimacy offered by the cute objects...involves the partial dismantling of the subject"[243] as well as the

[240] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 52
[241] Ibid.
[242] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 41
[243] Dale, "Introduction", 5

diminutization or deformation of the object. Grown out of the *kinderschema*, previous accounts have rendered this "dismantling" as a regression to child-form, but seen as a process of coevolution in which the successive child-forms of different species comes to relate to each other it appears instead as a strategy of "intentionally remaining in an...undefined or indeterminate state...one in which hollowness or emptiness is a natural state." To respond to the appeal of the cute-*kawaii* involves an intuition of the hollowness of an identity that is necessarily in flux, constantly inconstant in its relations to other identities. It "outlines a particular gaze upon the world," rather than an aesthetic or cognitive judgement, and as such is distinctly related to *style*.

For Richard Neer the question of *style*, or of the capacity to *stylize* involves judgments about the *human*. An archaeologist on a dig, he argues, makes use of her "connoisseurial judgment" to distinguish between "artifacts" and ordinary objects, and "in the broadest possible sense, the artifacts are those things she sees as being in the style of humans."[244] To "possess style," he suggests, is identical with being "an artifact." To put it another way, *style* conveys a sense of being *artifacted*—of *being made with intention*. But the apprehension of *styl*e as *intentional* does not necessarily resolve questions of specifically *human* agency, or subjectivity. In *Stanzas*, Giorgio Agamben relates the Latin root of "artifact," "*facticia"*—denoting something made by humans—to the Latin "*facere*" for "sacrifice," as well as the variants "*fatum,*" "*fari*," and "*fanum*," for "enchanted thing."[245] The artifact is undeniably a product of intentional labor, but its

[244] Richard Neer, "Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style," 5
[245] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas*, 35

etymology undercuts the assignation of that intention to the active will of a human agent. Instead, the intentionality that marks the style of an artifact might be understood in Mark Fisher's expanded sense of intentionality as "the capacity to feel a certain way *about* things,"[246] an affectively charged orientation towards the world.

Neer describes "style" as a function and a process of "seeing-as," a "shift in what one does when one sees." He cites Wittgenstein's "duck-rabbit," a drawing that appears from one angle as a duck, and from another as a rabbit, to elucidate "style" as a function of "aspect-seeing."[247] The duck-rabbit, however, is undergirded in Wittgenstein by the example of a "picture-object," a "picture-face," which Wittgenstein, "in some respects...engages with...as with a human face."[248] With the image-representation of a human-face it is possible to "study its expression," and "react to it as the expression of the human face"; If one is a child, he notes, or we might say if one is child-minded, one can "talk to a picture-man or picture-animal, can treat them as it treats dolls."[249] There appears an ontological gap in the analogy. In speaking with the image of the person, Wittgenstein does not suggest the child regards the image as if it were a real person, which is one implication of speaking with something inanimate, but that the child regards it as another kind of image-object. Later Wittgenstein writes, "If someone says, 'Now it is a face for me,' then one can ask him,' what change are you alluding to?"[250] This 'someone' appears to take the perspective of the child, to whom the image-face appears

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[246] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 83
[247] Neer, "Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style," 16, 17
[248] Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, 204
[249] Ibid.
[250] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 206

as ‘a face’ sometimes, and other times as a toy. Turning to the image-object of the duck-rabbit Wittgenstein describes “the change of aspect” from rabbit to duck (and picture to doll) as “like a perception...as if the object had changed before my eyes.”[251] He wonders, “what is different: my impression? my attitude?—-Can I say?”[252]

The change in aspect can be expressed only as an “expression of a *new* perception, and, at the same time an expression of an unchanged perception.”[253] In this the duck-rabbit resembles the relationship between Hello Kitty and her Mama Yuko Yamaguchi, and between Kitty and Kamikaze pilot: their capacity to “change aspects,” and exchange qualities is a function of their “compearance”—the co-apparition by which each is able to appear as it is as such only *in the place of*, only *with*, one another. The “dis-position” of Kitty for Mama for Commodity appears similar to the duck-rabbit’s “superimposition” of duck and rabbit such that “the head seen in *this* way hasn’t even the slightest similarity to the head seen in *that* way—although they are congruent.”[254] To give another example that distances cute-*kawaii* from the *kinderschema*, although all babies are formally congruent, they do not all appear cute-*kawaii* to all persons. The form of the baby has to accommodate the cute-*kawaii* of some other thing—a lover’s eyes, an ideal of parenthood, or a vision for the future. Accordingly, each of the things that appears cute-*kawaii* appears congruent with one another—at the same time it appears distinct. A repetition with a difference, what appears as a shift in aspect seems to follow

[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 205

the logic of an apparition, that is to say, a specter: one who cannot be spectated (yet who spectates) even as its effectuality is registered in the instant of its effect.

The apparition of the specter I invoke compresses several pertinent and interrelated logics of the virtual. The first reinforces the parallels between affect and style. Like the duckrabbit, "affect...is precisely this two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual."[255] It is not merely the image-object, but a concept-image-object of both duck and rabbit that enables the duckrabbit to display either aspect. Affect is the perception of this two-sidedness, which incorporates its perceiver, "*as seen from the side of the actual thing*" it perceives. It is a perception of the possibility of another perceiving us, amongst other possibilities, as it manifests in the style of sensory data perceived. It is the body recoiling from the form of a rat, or startled upon apprehending itself in the mirror; it is "*the virtual as point of view*."[256] Recall the virtual consists of the recursive interactions between the material and the conceptual *prior* to what emerges through rationalization as actual cause and effect. It is "a realm of potential" constituted by bodily things, thingly bodies, and their "pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies."[257] This is the night of "non-knowing," the decisive aporia in which ethics occurs, and which necessarily involves questions of response-ability, agency, and the possibility of regret—a feeling readily appended to "feeling haunted by," and, Spivak argues, a "typecase of the ethical sentiment."[258]

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[255] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 96
[256] Ibid.
[257] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 91
[258] Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in an Age of Globalization*, 103

Besides "uncanny," the space of the virtual might be aptly described as "eerie," an affect obtaining in the "*failure of absence* or a *failure of presence*,"[259] and with particular resonance with the cute-*kawaii*'s tendency to appear to desire both "to be known and recognized...and to hide."[260] "Eerie" is a second logic of the specter. Eeriness, as Mark Fisher writes, "raises questions about agency," and "the forces that govern our lives and the world."[261] In particular it concerns the coincidence of contingencies, "the influence of entities or objects that should not possess reflective agency...animals, telepathic forces, fate itself"[262] that circumscribe agency, intention, intentionality, and meaning. As an example of the eerie, Fisher offers "ruins or...other abandoned structures" (an example revisited chapters 2 and 5 in a different aspect). These structures confront us not with the problem of "why the people who created them disappeared," but rather "the nature of what disappeared." Before their muteness "what we witness...is the unintelligibility and the inscrutability of the Real itself."[263] Enter the archaeologist (or the geologist, or literary critic) who must then make a style judgment: does what appears here appear to mean to humans? Or, as Stanley Cavell asks of Jackson Pollock "how can a man...*mean* this?"[264] How does the meaning of something appear to mean (to me)?

Cute-*kawaii* names a response to this question: the meaning of a thing appears (a)cutely. That is to say, meaning appears formally weak, but affectively overfull in the event that it appears as a style of meaning. For example, although in any particular case a

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[259] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 61
[260] May, *The Power of Cute*, 42
[261] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 63-65
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 203

thing might be indicated to correlate with its dictionary definition, the thing and its definition exemplify rather than define. As Derrida writes, "a dictionary of words can never give a definition, it only gives examples,"[265] and an example "overturns and overthrows its received ideas...always carries beyond itself."[266] Being "for others, and beyond the self," the example "opens a testamentary dimension," especially relevant to the cute-*kawaii*. To ask of one's pet, "Who's a good girl?" is to inherit and deploy a category of "goodness" of which every member is idiosyncratic because whenever it is asked the question addresses itself to its exemplary answer. Cute-*kawaii* is an effect of appearing as an example of appearing to mean, or meaning to mean *that*, and by "that" to mean *something*. This is a third logic of the specter, the logic of *inheritance*. Definitions and examples are inherited, through language and Others respectively, and appear through inheritance as a relation without resolve, relations with the *virtual*, or virtual relations.

Like the "example" that exemplifies it, "an inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself."[267] The "presumed unity," of an inheritance, an example, or the cute-*kawaii* "can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*...to sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction."[268] That is, to follow the example of what is inherited—or not. The specter's logic of inheritance thus concerns, or more precisely comprises a disjuncture between "before" and "after." The experience of

[265] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20
[266] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 34
[267] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 16
[268] Ibid.

spectrality "consists in undoing the opposition...between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general."[269] Spectrality concerns something's appearing-as as it *presents* itself, overfull and overdetermined by what appears-with, and alongside it, dis-posing and delineating it: past example, future possibilities, and promises. Sara Ahmed supplements the specter's logic of inheritance with the logic of a footpath, in which "the relationship between "following a line" and the conditions for the emergence of lines is often ambiguous." A path through a wood "is made by the repetition of the event of the ground "being trodden" upon," and by its appearing as a flat, dusty surface it is itself and it captures "a trace of past journeys."

What appears as the form of a line through the woods can appear in the style of a path, even in the absence of official signage declaring it safe for human beings to follow. This style of appearing as a path for human beings—a clearly delineated line—itself derives from a line of inheritance. The path, the line, and the effect of line and path appearing as each other, are all "created by being followed and are followed by being created." They "direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion," and are "performative" in that "they depend on repetition" for their existence. Ahmed writes, "When people stop treading the path may disappear." A path appears as a communal "commitment" to "follow the path." It is a form of "social investment" that "promises return" in which "*subjects reproduce the lines that they follow*." The interdependence of the path and the persons following is distinctly eerie, an affect pertaining to instances in

[269] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 48

which "physical spaces condition perception"[270] and there is "a breakdown of the distinction between the player and what is being played."[271] The appearance of a path appears to compel us: "when we see the line of a path before us, we tend to walk upon it...so we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon." The eeriness of the path is compounded by the fact that "to be, or to have been committed to a path "suggests that it is already too late to turn back, and that what will happen 'will happen' as we are already 'behind' it." A path appears before us as if by fate, through "twisted forms of time and causality,"[272] and we appear to be compelled by a kind of "telepathic force," an "automatism in our subjectivity."[273]

The image of the path compels us, Ahmed argues, "to rethink the relationship between inheritance (the lines that we are given as our points of arrival into familial and social space) and reproduction (the demand that we return the gift of the line by extending that line." It is not necessary, though it may appear fated, that "we reproduce what we inherit, or that we always convert our inheritance into possessions."[274] Though it is received as a birthright, Derrida suggests, "inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task."[275] It is something one becomes entitled to by being entitled by a person, culture, or institution. What is inherited thus *appears* "*inborn*...given by...birth as much as *at*...birth...assigned by who (what) came before."[276] But appearing inborn, an inheritance

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[270] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 97
[271] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 87
[272] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 12
[273] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 55
[274] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 16-17
[275] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 54
[276] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 19

is nonetheless touched by the contingencies of being both born, and declared *as* something, in a certain place, hailed by a certain name "that comes before me, before any present, thus before any past present, but also what, for that very reason, comes from the future or as future."[277] An inheritance produces both promises and commitments to a future. Even in the case it is unwanted, we become committed to dispensing our inheritance. Thus, we are possessed by what we might become possessed of, and though this delimits, it does not secure the range of possibilities haunting our inheritances.

Ahmed is careful to distinguish between a "promise" and a "commitment." While the former merely "points to the future," the latter exerts a pressure. To put it another way, a promise guarantees nothing while a commitment guarantees a consequence. 'To commit' or "to commit to," Ahmed suggests are always, "also a commitment made as an effect of an action." Something always entails from what is committed, and a commitment is always ushered from an apparent necessity. It names the conversion of something virtual to something actual, even perhaps if that actuality is a negation. Even if it is "kept" a promise is never "actualized," never resolves into a rational distribution of causes and effects, before and after. It remains virtual. While "to commit," describes "how it is that we become directed toward specific goals, aims, and aspirations through what we 'do' with our bodies," what promises, and what is promised, is always relation to a relation. A promise is always and only present as the relation of being able to exact a promise—a virtual relation that nonetheless has material effects. For instance, we remain near those who keep, and withdraw from those who break them, producing not lines, but

[277] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 33

spheres. A promise is an effect, an invitation, and a gateway to (emotional, physical, social) proximity.

Accordingly, ghosts promise to appear only where we follow in their footsteps. The specters of an inheritance appears as an injunction to ""to learn how to live" by following the example of a predecessor, which is to say what one inherits is always an "ethics itself," an *ethos*, a style of being related to human things. Derrida poses the figure of the specter as "a question of repetition," since it always "comes by *coming back*." The question of repetition represents a problem of agency: "because it *begins by coming back*...one cannot control the specter's comings and goings,"[278] The specter appears to arrive where it already was, where it was before it arrived. It is like a ghost which does not appear to enter, but only to suddenly appear where it was already haunting: it does not appear from somewhere else, but appears as its aspect shifts from invisible to visible. Similarly, we can suddenly lose a path even as we follow it; and, getting lost might appear promising. We might commit. To follow is always "repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*."[279] This is both the danger and the potential of the specter: its power.

It is, as Derrida figures, "*both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again."[280] The specter is ghost and corpse, spirit and body *simultaneously*. At the same time it is the absence of their "unity" in a person, a thing. The specter is a supplement. It makes present the absence of the totality of

[278] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11
[279] Ibid.
[280] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10

presence. It "gathers" to a present disjuncture the possibilities of appearing after the likeness of a path, a person—the possibilities that appear as they present themselves. Although it enables repetition, and return, the temporal logic of the specter is opposed to time's "*being-right*, in the right or the straight path of that which walks upright."[281] The specter's appearance returns us to a moment prior to becoming a form of human being, but always after some style of being has come to appear "human." The path of the specter is opposed to, but does not exclude, the "straight path" of the human. It is only more capacious (rapacious). The lineage of the specter "seems to come from and return to *the earth*, to come from it as from some buried clandestinity...humus, mold, or tomb...to return to it as to the lowest, the humble, humid, humiliated...in silence, as low as possible to the earth, the return of an animal"[282]

The profligacy of cute-*kawaii* style constellates these interrelated specters as "a dialogue between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the unthreatening and the menacing, the present and the withdrawn, the visible and the invisible."[283] Cute-*kawaii* is the appearing-as as if appearing-with-an-aspect-shift. Inasmuch as it concerns a "virtual" form of the human, cute-*kawaii* follows the logic of a haunting—the presence of the absence of a totality of possible relations—what Harraway calls the "myriad kingdom of terrans." It is an affect that does not produce a line of intention, but a sphere of intentionality in Mark Fisher's meaning of an "aboutness." Something feels intensely human *about* the thing declared "cute-*kawaii*." In this, cute-*kawaii*'s compulsive profligacy opens into the

[281] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20
[282] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 93
[283] May, *The Power of Cute*, 25

possibility of responding to the appeal of something that only appears as human. Cute-*kawaii* style is a resemblance, re-seeming, or a seeming to *be again*, another of something; it appears to come after and to follow from something that can be styled human suffering-experience. To respond to the appeal of what is inherited from (as) a specter is to make possible the appearing to fulfil a "teleology, or eschatology," but also to make possible its appearing as possibility, contingency—what Derrida calls "hauntology." Abstract though it is, the hauntological nature of cute-*kawaii*'s profligacy can brought low to the earth if we follow a cute "gray something" as it makes it rounds through Joyce's *Ulysses*,

A Tale of Cute *Ulysses' Kawaii* "Rats!"

We begin our tale, *in media res,* with the question of how Japan and Ireland, the Japanese and the Irish come to appear to and as each other, which has both theoretical and historical pertinence to a tale of cute *Ulysses' kawaii* rat. Of foremost concern to us is what Japanese scholars of Irish literature perceive as its resonance with a particularly Japanese sensibility. "The Irish imagination, seeing 'the invisible' and the perennial belief in 'the supernatural' (even prior to the arrival of Christianity in the fifth century), made a deep impression on the students," of Lafcadio Hearn's 1896 lectures on English poetry at Tokyo Imperial University. Their response emerged partly from the desire "to contradict an increasingly materialistic sense of values in their ordinary life" imposed by industrial capitalist modernity, a desire shared by Hearn who emphasized "the possible future value" of what appear as pre-modern "superstitions." From these early encounters

emerged "a tendency in Celtic studies in Japan," as recounted by Toshi Furomoto, to compare the Irish and Japanese on the basis of a shared "incompatibility" with Western rationalism: a culturally cultivated capacity to hold in the mind "two opposing elements, such as this world and the other world, the visible and the invisible, the past and the present, or paganism and Christianity."[284] A resemblance appears between a Japanese and an Irish *ethos* that is based on what is perceived as a shared propensity for relating to *the virtual*, to what appears-as-present in spite of its absence. This dynamic is born out in the history of reciprocal influence between the worlds of Japanese and Irish literary aesthetics. The resemblance between these two cultural sensibilities is reflected in a shared minority position with respect to the global political and economic powers of the early 20th century.

The tropes of cute-*kawaii* appear early in the shared inheritance of Irish and Japanese modernisms. In *Finnegans Wake*, "approximately 80 Japanese(compounded) words appear."[285] Although Joyce did not speak Japanese, he "was exposed to the Japanese language in Dublin, Trieste, Zurich, and Paris,"[286] and "probably had some friends who spoke Japanese fluently." Although most of the Japanese words that appear in his work "are basic words used in daily speech."[287] Kumiko Yamada nonetheless compellingly argues that Joyce was deeply impressed by the "simplicity and ornamentalism of Japanese language and of Japanese beauty." Of particular appeal to

[284] Toshi Furomoto, *The Power to See Unseen Things*: *The Gift from Celtic Fairies* 2009
[285] Ito, "The United States of Asia," 329
[286] Kumiko Yamada *James Joyce and the East: Roadmarks to Finnegans Wake* 2017
[287] Eishiro Ito, "United States of Asia: James Joyce and Japan," 324

him, she suggests, was the Japanese style of using the first-person pronoun. Not only is the first-person used differently depending on the speaker's gender, age, and class, but it also shifts between degrees of formality and intimacy. Consequently a speaker might make use of multiple different "Is" depending on their relation to the listener. Yamada points to an instance in *Finnegans Wake* in which Joyce fuses ten Japanese first-person pronouns: "Washywatchywataywatashy!Oirasessheorebukujibun!watacooshy lot!"

Here we have an example of the cute-*kawaii*'s profligate, compressive, *compearance* as well as its startling acuity. The phrase presents as a mush a totality of possible subject positions, but without compromising the difference of those positions. In other words, it presents the promise of an inheritance without committing to an illusion of its "unity." Not only are the multiplicity of "Is," presented as a spectral disjunction, a possibility of a shift in seeing-as, it is also what Derrida describes as a "break in the monologue." The formal technique of "agglutination," a linguistic phenomenon in which in "complex words are formed by stringing together morphemes without changing their phonetic pronunciation," is repeatedly disjointed by exclamation points. The excessive use of exclamation points is associated with what Sharon Kinsella calls cute-*kawaii* handwriting. They function both to heighten the emotional intensity and intimacy of the communications, and to stylistically call attention to itself *as* a cute-*kawaii* communication. In Joyce they similarly function to transform what appears in English as a single, unified, I, and in Japan as a collection of standardized "Is" into what appears an intimate, emotional *address* to some other, outside the speaker. The multiplicity of subject positions present in the totality of possible first-persons in Japanese, but through

that invocation invokes the specters also of the totality of possible relations to the subject as observed from the side of the subject.

This tendency toward the virtual is born out as well in the Japanese literary context. Beginning in the 1880s, prior to Lacfadio Hearn's lectures, young Japanese academics and lay readers became enamored with contemporary Irish literature. Although it began with Celtic revival writers such as W.B. Yeats, the affair arrived in full force with Joyce's *Ulysses*. Curiously, the current of influence with regards to representing a subject position is reversed. Following its Japanese publication in 1931, "numerous ambitious writers tried to follow Joycean methods, especially stream of consciousness."[288] Among the earliest of these was Junichiro Tanizaki's *Manji* (1928), a novel featuring a lesbian narrator that makes use of Joycean style interior monologue. Direct or indirect, Joyce also appears to have influenced the nascent literary and mass media genre of *shoujo,* or "girl's culture." The stories featured in *shojo* literary magazine made use of a "decorative prose style, and particularly the tendency to break sentences into poetic fragment," as well as an "attempt to portray the inner monologue of their characters in a convincing, sympathetic way" through "the use of colloquial language to "create [a] sense of...immediacy and authenticity."[289] These are simultaneously descriptors of *Ulysses* and the cute-*kawaii*.

Similarly, the geopolitical relationship between Japan and Ireland from 1880 to 1933 might be fairly described as cute-*kawaii*, even according to Ngai's suspicious

[288] Ito, "United States of Asia: James Joyce and Japan," 328
[289] Deborah Shamoon, *Passionate Friendships*, 79

definition. It is defined by the Japanese and Irish coming to see each other as examples, both positive and negative, in the decades before the Second World War. From the mid-1880s to the mid-1930s "'Ireland' and 'Irish literature' appeared as striking topics in Japanese journalism...especially related to the Home Rule Bills, the Land War and the Celtic Revival." The interest of the Japanese public in the struggle of Irish nationals for self-rule, Irish farmers against industrialization and the expropriation of resources, and Irish writers for a national literature suggests they looked to the Irish initially as a model of adapting to, resisting, or inhabiting a newly globalized, rationalized, industrialized, and commodified culture. Following the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, a similar sentiment appears in Ireland. In 1905, the year of Japan's victory and just 11 years before the Easter Rising, *Dana: An Irish Magazine of Independent Thought* published a review of Inazo Nitobe's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1899). It begins "WAR compels attention" (a sentence that also demonstrates the power of style to compel attention), and considers how "a minor Asian country like Japan could beat" a major European power."[290] According to Eishiro Ito, it is at this point that "the Irish became interested in Japan...seeking for a way to be independent from the British empire."[291] At the turn of the century the Japanese and the Irish engage each other in a virtual relationship marked by imitation, difference, powerlessness, and aggression.

However, even at this moment of apparent recognition the tendency of cute-*kawaii* to confuse identities, and shift aspects emerges. Although Japanese readers early

[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.

on expressed a preference for Irish authors, prior to Hearn's lecture, "a misleading conception" prevailed that figured "Irish literary writings as part of British literature."[292] To simplify, from the Japanese perspective the West began to appear with two aspects. As Ireland, it resembled the world of Japanese farmers and intellectuals: anti-modern, mythical, minor. As Britain, it represented the threat of empire, and the necessity of industrializing and militarizing to respond to that threat. Under the influence of the latter example, Japan assumes "consciously or not, a colonialist standing,"[293] These two aspects blend as they are repeated in the context of Japanese nationalism, and Japanese national literature. From the "Anglo-Irish relation," Ito writes, Imperial Japan derived "a model of a new partnership." The "sacrifices and sufferings" endured by Irish writers under British rule appeared as the means to "the Irish creation of their own literature in English."[294] While Irish writers initially appealed to the Japanese on the basis of their shared resistance to modernization, the confusion of British and Irish (trans)national identities, as well as the distributions of power and influence in the global context, eventually cause the appeal of Irish literature to appear as the effect of colonial Britain's attempts to "civilize" them. Consequently, "too easily comes a proposal for the Korean people under the control of Japanese Imperialist government to create a new literature of their own in the Japanese language" (an effort paralleled in Japan's domestic context by proponents of the *Genbunitchi* movement's designs to subordinate spoken, colloquial Japanese, to a

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[292] Ito, "United States of Asia: James Joyce and Japan," 324
[293] Akiyo Susaki *The Cross Border Imagination: The Reciprocal Influence of Japanese and Irish Literature* 2014
[294] Ito, "United States of Asia: James Joyce and Japan," 327-329

standardized written language, and backlash to the *shoujo* genre).

In December 1933, just two years after the first Japanese translation of *Ulysses* was published, Yukio Haruyama publishes the first full length study of Joyce in Japanese: *Joyceana: The Literary Movement Spearheaded by Joyce*. This would be the last publication on Joyce, or any Anglophone writer, until a decade after the end of the Second World War. Although, in Ito's estimation, "Japan had been among the most advanced countries in Joycean studies"[295] before the war, the rise in nationalism drove the Joyceans underground. The culture of Britain and America, the former previously a model of civilized society, came to be characterized as "*Kichiku Bei-Ei,"* or "Brutal America and Britain, " and "Japanese people could not read English books and translations openly."[296] In Paris, Joyce was becoming symmetrically disenchanted with Japan. Although initially he and "other Irish people thought it good that a minor Asian country like Japan had defeated one of the great powers,"[297] as Japan came to reflect the nationalist and colonial ideologies of Britain, Joyce's feelings towards Japan became more ambivalent, if they did not develop into a "deep antipathy."[298]

The prelude ended, our tale can now proceed from its beginning, with the facts of the matter. The phenotype of *Rattus norvegicus*, the Norway or "fancy" rat sold in pet shops and experimented upon, is remarkably consistent with recognized qualities of the cute-*kawaii*. Among the sleeping positions described on the website of Jemma Fettes,

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[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Kumiko Yamada *James Joyce and the East: Roadmarks to Finnegans Wake* 2017

registered rat breeder with the British National Fancy Rat Society, are the ovular "rat ball," which "involves the rat tucking its head between its legs and tucking it's paws in" to protect its "precious internal organs;" "pancaking," a "sign of an intense relaxation," in which the rat flattens its highly plastic body against a smooth, cool surface; the "rat pile," a rat's "most natural sleeping position," which both keeps them warm and bonds members of the group; and what she considers a "particularly cute" behavior of sleeping on their backs with their legs in the air ("more commonly seen in young rats," this cartoonish imitation of *rigor mortis* has startled at least one rat owner).[299] Additionally, rats display strong tendencies towards the sociality, empathy, and anthropomorphism Dale identifies as the "appeal" of the cute-*kawaii*.

"The most frequently used species in behavioral studies, especially those involving learning,"[300] *R. norvegicus* has repeatedly demonstrated the ability not only to recognize distress in other rats,[301] based on observation alone,[302], but also to prioritize diminishing the other rat's distress over self-gratification.[303] One experiment even suggests this is reciprocal, and that rats "imagine...the perspective"[304] of their scientist-caretakers. Taught to play-hide-and-seek by neuroscientist Michael Brecht five male rats displayed a preference for opaque over transparent boxes, and remained "silent while

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[299] Fettes, "Individual Rat Behaviors," *http://www.isamurats.co.uk/*
[300] John G. Vandenbergh, "Use of House Mice in Biomedical Research", 133–135
[301] Harrison Wein, "Rats Show Empathy, Too," https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters
[302] Cox, S.S., Reichel, C.M. "Rats display empathic behavior independent of the opportunity for social interaction," 1097-1104
[303] Emily Underwood, "Rats Forsake Chocolate To Save Drowning Companion, "https://www.sciencemag.org
[304] Emily Underwood, "Lab Rats Play Hide and Seek For the Fun Of It," https://www.sciencemag.org

they hid, despite making ultrasonic squeaks while seeking." The same experiment suggests the rats engaged in the game as prosocial play rather than in pursuit of material need. Not only were they rewarded with "petting and tickling," rather than food, upon discovering the scientist the rats performed "what are known as "joy jumps" or *freudensprung*,"[305] before "scurrying off to a new hiding place...extending the game and postponing the reward."

Although Brecht opines his work appears "trivial" to most scientists, a number of other experiments evince a strong anthropomorphic tendency in the scientists' relationship to the laboratory rat. Straightforwardly cute-*kawaii* examples include documenting the inaudibly high-pitched 'giggle' elicited by tickling[306], and teaching them to drive miniature cars[307]. The experiment most "exemplary of the ways in which behavioral experimentation at once marks and violates the human-animal distinction" appears less appealing. Popularized in the public sphere by journalist Thomas Wolfe's "O Rotten Gotham," John B. Calhoun's "Population Density and Social Pathology" would become "one of the most widely cited [papers] in psychology," and produced a "macabre spectacle of crowded psychopathological rats."[308] Placing rats in enclosures "with all their visible needs met," but deprived of space and freedom to movement, the rats soon "became aggressive." "Infant mortality rose 96%," as "abandoned or even attacked their pups." Artificial scarcity drove competition for resources to extremes, and in short order

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[305] A behavior Brecht notes is common to a number of mammals including humans,
[306] Emily Underwood, "Watch These Ticklish Rats Laugh and Jump for Joy," https://www.sciencemag.org
[307] Alice Klein, "Scientists Have Trained Rats to Drive Tiny Cars to Collect Food," https://www.newscientist.com
[308] Edmund Ramsden and Jon Adams, "Escaping the Laboratory," 761

the “dead were cannibalized,” and “subordinate animals withdrew psychologically.” Comprising “the majority [of rats] in the late stages of growth,” these subordinated rats subsisted “as a vacant huddled mass in the center of the pen.”[309] The enduring influence of Calhoun not just in the scientific literature, but in “novels, film, and comic books” is attributable in part to the experiment’s “careful use of language.”[310] In order to construct a “typology” of “pathological crowding behaviors” the rats were “given names immediately resonant with human types.” In conjunction with the preexisting association of rats with the “urban and moral degeneration” of “human life in the densely-packed inner cities” it was virtually “ensured that the experiments were quickly adopted as "scientific evidence" of social decay.”[311]

This strong tendency towards anthropomorphizing the subject of their experiments makes it perhaps unsurprising that a number of scientists who work with rats develop “compassion fatigue,” suffering from “deep physical and emotional exhaustion” in response to their extended experience of “moral stress.”[312] Despite this, rats are an atypically cute animal, and even the domesticity of the “fancy,” or Norway rat, is not yet determined. Although “the docility of rats [has] increased,” with each successive generation bred in captivity, they still exhibit certain “nervous or savage behaviours (jumping, squealing, and biting) towards humans” such that it is difficult to “distinguish between domesticated and non-domesticated forms” of rat.[313] This antisociality presents

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[309] Ibid.
[310] Ramsden and Adams, “Escaping the Laboratory,” 763
[311] Ibid.
[312] Joseph T Newcombe, “Compassion Fatigue, Euthanasia Stress, and Their Management”, 289-292
[313] Taylor & Francis, *The Domestication and Exploitation of Plants and Animals 2017*

one barrier to the cuteness of rats. They fail to entertain the "fantasy of unconditional love" facilitated by "our culture's infantilization of dogs,"[314] and human children.[315] Another is the cultural association of rats with the disgusting (with garbage, decay, and plague), which persists in spite of the fact that "rats spend 40% of their waking time grooming themselves" (Bolles 306). As Sara Ahmed writes, "disgust reads [its] objects": "The other is not dirty...the other is already *seen as* dirt, as the carrier of dirt which contaminates the food that has been touched" by the other.[316] Manifested by a visceral recoiling of the body[317], disgust appears antithetical to the cute response that is "high in approach motivation."[318] Indeed, Simon May argues cuteness is disgust's "real opposite," as that which "humanizes" what disgust "dehumanizes."[319] However, Ngai observes feelings of cuteness often coincide with "feelings of repugnance," which repel us.[320] Conversely, Sara Ahmed sees the movement of disgust as ambivalently doubled with desire in that it "brings the body perilously close to an object only then to pull away," and so the "distancing," that establishes the subject apart from the object first "requires proximity."[321] This proximity with the disgusting is one leitmotif of both "cute" and "rats" in *Ulysses*, but they refrain with others as well, most powerfully language, meaning, appeal, and otherness.

It is necessary, for our purposes, to follow the rat from the outside into *Ulysses*, in

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[314] Donna Harraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 37-38
[315] Kincaid 72
[316] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 82
[317] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85
[318] Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 51
[319] May, *The Power of Cute*, 121
[320] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 167
[321] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 84-85

order to observe how and why Joyce figures both Bloom, and "that rat" as cute-*kawaii*. I begin with the observation that "rats" and "writing," beyond the phonetic funhouse mirror of their slight slant rhyme, are etymologically linked. The word "rat" seems to have always and only ever referred to itself as the animal it names. The roots of its etymological tree being particularly deep, its branches are negligible lacking any deferral of analogy, or evidence of grafting. The Gaelic *radan*, the Italian *ratto*, the Old Saxon *ratta*, and the German *ratte*, etc. each names only that *that* is a "rat,"and that *there have been* "rats." According to the *OED,* "these forms indicate extensive communication of the word," but also make it impossible to fix an origin. "Rat," furthermore, shares this fragmentary form with its common companions "cat" and "dog," as well as "frog," "hog," "pig," and "stag." Together these words belong to "a set of words of uncertain or phonologically problematic etymology…[that] denote animals." "Stylistically marked in Old English" and "considered non-literary or informal," it has been argued that they develop from "originally hypocoristic forms"[322] (). Here we should note that *hypocorism*, "denoting...a pet name or diminutive form of a name," from the Greek for "playing the child," envelops this whole class of English animal words in cute-kawaii tropes—smallness, simplicity, communicability, and intimacy—from their inception.

"Rat" is unique among these, however, both with regards to its comparatively late introduction to English, and with regards to the highly negative associations attached to it that seemingly disqualify it from the cute-*kawaii* affect that the other examples might elicit. The historical processes that bring "rats" into being are thus processes of "de-

[322] 'Dog," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*

cutification" by which rats are discursively disqualified from lovability. At the same time, these discursive processes thematically center on discourse, and discursion—the movement of meaning, and the movement of modes of meaning. All proposed etymological roots of "rat" run into and alongside the etymologies of words of language, judgment, and reflection. First entering common usage in English in the 12th century, the most likely derivation of "rat" is from the proto-indo European *rehd* for "to gnaw, to scratch, to scrape, to tear", a progenitor it inherits from the Middle Low German *radde* for "to read" and the Middle High German *rate,* meaning "to think, deem, judge, estimate" by way of the proto-germanic *rattaz*. It is from *rattaz* that we get the current Latin used in the scientific name of the genus *rattus*—a homophone of the Latin *ratus* for "to consider." A homophone, rather than a relative outright, since living Latin made no distinction between a rat and a mouse—both were merely *mus*. "Rattus" came to be used in Medieval Latin only over the course of the first hundred years of the Crusades, and Englishman marched their way east.[323]

Like "cute," and "*kawaii*," then, the word "rat" emerges at a moment of increased intercultural exchange, and acquires at its inception an association with Otherness that seems opposed to the familiarity and intimacy of anything cute-kawaii, an association that persists in the most pernicious modern usages of "rats." In his 1921 etymological dictionary, for instance, Ernest Weekley connects the origin of the word with the movement of racialized bodies and the threat of contamination, the word as well as "the

[323] Michael McCormick, "Rats, Communication, Plague"

animal having come from the East with the race-migrations."[324] In fact, what is known today as *Rattus norvegicus*, the common brown or sewer rat, although it originated in East Asia hundreds of thousands of years ago, did not arrive in the English speaking world until the 18th century, and came by way of Norwegian ships. What Medieval English scholars newly christened a "rat" was actually *Rattus rattus*, the black rat, who arrived on the island during the Roman occupation, and sustained a native population there since at least the first century CE.[325] Thus, "rat" and rats are associated at the outset with a differential function of language, marking a distinction not only between "rat" and "mouse," but between West and East, and, cute and un-cute . While the rat assumes associations with the contaminated, the disgusting, the urban, modern, external, and expurgated, a mouse is the animal avatar of that most successful incarnation of capitalist cuteness, Disney.

"Writing" arrives at us more straightforwardly. The Old English *wrītan* meaning "to incise, engrave, write, draw," or to "bestow by writing" as in an official *writ*, descends from the Proto-Germanic *wrītaną* meaning "to carve, to scratch, or to scrape," whose possible predecessors include the Proto-Indo-European *wrey* for "to rip, tear", and *rehd* for "to scrape, tear, scratch, gnaw" (*OED*). To write "rat," then, produces not only a phonetic, but a sensory, and a semantic echo, as the *sound* of putting words to tablet, papyrus, or vellum resembles the *sound* of putting paws to the insides of the walls. Consequently, "rat" names a word that demonstrates the capacity of naming to carve out,

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[324] Weekley, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, 1200 qtd. "Rat," *Online Etymological Dictionary*
[325] Donald Engels, *Classical Cats: The Rise and Fall of the Sacred Cat*, 111

scrape away, or scratch at the meanings of things in the world. It calls attention to the palimpsestic process by which meaning comes to be inscribed on the surfaces of things, how affect comes to "stick" to those surfaces and our skins, and how certain things come to appear to us in a certain way, how they arrive, as Sara Ahmed says, "with their histories intact." The "intactness" of a history, here, is in tension with the intactness of the thing, which in order to testify to its history must scrape out its flesh, and scarify its face. The scratching and scraping that is writing, and the histories it produces, relates to the category of things Stephen Greenblatt and Wai-Chee Dimock describe as "resonant."[326][327]

A resonant thing is a broken thing; the brokenness of the thing embodies its openness to human manipulation, and to the historical contingency of value or meaning. Wearing on their skin successive generations of damages that mark their transformation from living tool to museum piece, the resonant thing is animated by its own destruction. It testifies, speaks to its audience, and enjoins them to be attentive to their own world's openness to demise. Drawing on Thomas Greene's *The Vulnerable Text*, Dimock more specifically argues that the quality of "literariness" which attaches to writing is in fact dependent on this vulnerability to manipulation. Greene writes that though texts are "often praised for outlasting violence," in truth, "they reach us only as the vestigial fragments of a once-living civilization," and as such are beset at each moment by the risk of becoming parody, of being evacuated of intellectual seriousness or depth of

[326] Wai-Chee Dimock, "A Theory of Resonance"
[327] Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder"

meaning.[328] Simply through the "historicity of its signifiers," and "the haeccity of inflection," a text is vulnerable to misunderstanding; but it is only by being vulnerable to misunderstanding that the text can participate in the "perennial series of exchanges, allusions, and responses" that define the quality or category of the literary more generally. For Greene, to engage in the kind of Bakhtinian dialogic interplay of voices that vitalizes the literary is to necessarily become vulnerable, since dialogue requires "an admission of vulnerability," and to become "open to the challenge of divergent or opposing utterances."[329]

The forms of writing we inherit are "haunted" by its radical contingency, by the multiplicity of possible voices whose haeccity might inflect, or whose historicity might try to signify over-against that inflection. Anything written, at the moment of its writing risks becoming untimely, becomes open to transformations of circumstance that might render its meaning nonsensical or naive from beyond the grave. A thing's appearing *as* writing, appearing *as* meaningful, in addition to appearing *with* a particular air, but prior to appearing *to* mean, is a function of its openness to contingency—that is to say, it is a function the continuity of the system of signs with everything of significance that is not a sign. "Rats" and "writing" are both things that appear *as* scratching and scraping in that they appear *with* scratching and scraping, and are indissolubly caused by, cause, or coincide with the sound. This makes signification both possible and problematic. A significant example: in pre-20th century Japan, as in ancient Rome, there was no word to

[328] Thomas Greene, *The Vulnerable Text*, 101
[329] Thomas Greene, *The Vulnerable Text*, 102

distinguish rats from mice. Both were referred to as *nezumi,* from the Chinese ideogram "鼠（*shu*)" which was also used interchangeably to refer to all rodents. To write "rat" originally was to *conjure* an immaterial entity, the double of real rats and real people,—a doubling of *Rattus rattus* denominated by its name—and thus to transfigure the latter into the former. There never was a rat in Asia, nor anywhere, until by chance "rat" was needed, and rats were available, to mean something other than the rodent, as well as something other than the *really* Other.

As it concerns the *appearance* of being writing, the material process by which it appears, and the *appearing* of significance prior to the process of signification, "rats" and our other animal appellations assume some of the semantic and semiotic dimensions of the Joycean "yes" of *Ulysses.* Derrida describes this "Yes," as "the yes that is heard...that travels like a citation or like a circulating rumor, circumnavigating through the labyrinth of the ear, what one only knows through *oui-dire* [hearsay],"[330] and I contend this "yes" may be at the heart of the cute-kawaii affect, often characterized as a "saying yes to desire."[331]

"Buying postcards in Tokyo," Derrida observes in "*Ulysses*, Gramophone" that "We still do not know what *yes* means and how this little word, if it is indeed a word, functions in language.[332]" This "little" word, "*yes*," resembles in Derrida's assessment something cute-*kawaii*, something diminutive that nonetheless exercises an enigmatic power, a formless something that resists classification, appears—to use Simon May's

[330] Jacques Derrida, "*Ulysses,* Gramophone" 49
[331] Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 81
[332] Derrida, "*Ulysses*, Gramophone", 47, 48

descriptor of the cute-*kawaii—unpindownable.* Strengthening this association with the cute-*kawaii* is Joyce's own sense that his "yes" was "the least forceful," "barely pronounced," "female word" signaling "acquiescence, self-abandon, relaxation, the end of all resistance."[333] The "weakness" of the word, like the much-touted weakness of the cute-*kawaii*, appears ambiguous, however. Our "yes" survives after having absorbed the function of the older "yea," and was formerly used only in the case of negative questions to *strongly* affirm the response[334]. Furthermore, both forms of affirmation derive from the Old English *gise* or *gese*, meaning "so be it!"[335] "Yes" thus inherits the power to express a *surrender to what is*—to the world that, who, or which appears before us. It is this function of affirmative surrender to the other that Derrida highlights in the Joycean "yes," and that is mirrored in "rats," and our other animal appellations.

While "yes" "names nothing," for Derrida, and our animal words seemingly *do*, the hypocoristic nature of those names transforms their function from referential to expressive, and reframes them within a complementary enclosure of call and response. For Derrida "yes" has always and only "the form of an answer... [occurring] after the other, to answer the claim or the question...of the other, even if of the other in me, of the representation in me of another speech."[336] "Yes" affirms the presence of its speaker in relation to some other, "simply registering that we are there, present, listening...ready to answer but without answering anything else for the moment than the readiness to

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[333] Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses*, 147
[334] "Yes" *adv. Oxford English Dictionary Online*
[335] "Yes," *advb. Online Dictionary of Etymology*
[336] Derrida, "*Ulysses,* Gramophone," 48

answer," and in affirming that present makes the speaker's presence vulnerable to another, for even if still unseen she now addresses herself to its possibility.[337] If we accept the possibility of "rat," "cat," and "dog" as "pet names", rather than merely nouns then "yes" attaches itself to the act of naming as *the response one gives when one's name is called*. I propose the fragmented, palimpsestic forms by these pet words arrive are the visible, vocalizable remains, of an intimate communicative circle closed by the dumb body speech of long dead animals—"for there can be a *oui,* a *yes*, without the word *yes*."[338] The fragmented, palimpsestic forms of these animal names thus index both the vulnerability to breakages of historical use or disuse described by Greene, and a more fundamental breakage in language Derrida associates with the affirmative interjection—a break "in the monologue."

The monologue he refers to specifically is Molly Bloom, whose introduction parallels her unrecorded waking utterances with the wordless, feline yowling of "Poldy's" "pussem" (each of the Blooms, including daughter Milly, receives a pet name), but "yes" interrupts the monologic aspirations of systemized language and thought more generally because it prevents these systems from enclosing themselves. To say 'yes' is to be aware of "being-called"—of being a "being-called" that is being called to respond. The source of the break to which we respond need not be human. Our "yes" puts us in touch with, makes us answerable *to*, a wide range of others, human and non-human, and all of these are involved in the rupture. To respond "yes" locates the speaker at the

[337] Derrida, "*Ulysses,* Gramophone," 52
[338] Ibid.

intersection between themselves, things, and their others. This is true both of the human beings who name rats "rats," and the rats who can be taught to come when their names are called. "Yesses" involve a kind of "mental telephony."[339] They "inscribe a distance," which is to say it *scrapes,* or *tear*s at what thus scraped appears distant. it marks the otherness of language vulnerable to the meaning of others.

"Yes," this ejaculated sign of us to the other, "institutes" the possibility of monologue because it demarcates the space in which it is possible to fail to listen to others, or to fail to even hear the call, or to silence them. A monologist addresses their audience in the same way a poet addresses an object: in the mode of an apostrophe, with an expectation of understanding without response. "Yes," at the same time "prohibits, *and* disrupts" the possibility of "monologue,"[340] because in addressing the other, *yes* contains the possibility of a *no*. *Yes*, again, was distinguished in middle english by its forceful opposition to the negative, as opposed to the more tepid "yea." The affirmations with which Molly closes *Ulysses*, ambiguous in so many respects, concretely refer to an instance where "yes" is grammatically correct in this older sense: proposals demand a strict yes or no. To say "yes," because it presents us to the presence of another, underlines both the possible absence of a "yes" in response to our calls, and the positive *vulnerability* to the other's responding *no*. We may discover, in opening ourselves to the other, that what we believed—yes—was true, was a mistake, a deception, or a misunderstanding. The "telephony" of "yesses" thus makes possible the distortion of

[339] Derrida, "*Ulysses*, Gramophone", 51
[340] Derrida, "*Ulysses*, Gramophone", 52

meaning, but the possibility of meaning what was said, of our meaning being understood, is not foreclosed. The "telephonic *techne*" Derrida attributes the affirmative interjection, I suggest, is on display when prompted by the reproachful gaze of his puppy, the puppy's person understands the proximity between the dog, the door, and its restless tail, and assents to let it out. If we cannot say for certain the dog or the rat assumes their person's meaning-to-call-them, we can observe at least how often persons assume their animals mean to call them to respond—to be responsible—to feed, or pet, or play with their animal.

It is this intuition of a pet's meaning, or of the possibility of their meaning *to* mean *to* their person, that rejoins "yes," with "rats," "writing," and the cute-*kawaii*. The intuition of being addressed *by* and related with what calls, the responsive openness to what appears on the page or in the gaze that is signified by "the monosyllabic quasi-interjection of the "oui," "yes," "ay""[341]—as well as the Japanese はい (*hai*)—and appears central to the etymology of 可愛い, (*kawaii*). Derived from the Chinese 可愛 (*ke'ai)* for "loveable," the kanji used to write *kawaii* in Japanese joins 可 (*ka*), which means "to be allowed, permitted, possible" with 愛 (*ai*), which means "love" or "tenderness." Gary Cross's characterization of cuteness as "a saying yes to desire" appears literal in the case of *kawaii—kawai*i meaning yes love do—doing yes to love—saying yes I will yes—to love. And the entanglement of *yesses* with both writing and the cute-*kawaii*, and the contingency of appearing to *mean*, is borne out by the material

[341] Ibid.

history of the *kawaii.*

In Japan, Sharon Kinsella observes "The origin of the modern term *kawaii* in the early 1970s coincides with the beginning of the cute handwriting craze."[342] "Arrived at partly through the romanization of Japanese text", and "more often written in fractured English or pseudo French than in Japanese," cute-*kawaii* handwriting was variously described as *marui ji* (round writing), *koneko ji* (kitten writing), *manja ji* (comic writing), or *burikko ji* (fake-child writing).[343] Appearing in Japanese middle and high schools nationwide, cute-kawaii handwriting featured "rounded characters, English, *katakana* [the simplified Japanese syllabary used for foreign loan words], and little cartoon pictures such as hearts, stars, and faces inserted randomly into the text."[344] Cute-*kawaii* handwriting furthermore employed the "horizontal left to right" format of written English, made "liberal use of exclamation points," and incorporated English words such as "love" and "friend."[345] To what extent cute-*kawaii* handwriting was an intentional form of political or cultural rebellion given the uncertain status of middle school children as intentional political actors, it was received by authorities as such. Although stylized such that it was difficult to read, it was also the case that teachers *refused* to read cute-kawaii writing, not marking work written in the style, and in some cases banning it entirely.[346]

The aggressive repression of what was then perceived as Western style, and the

[342] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 222
[343] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 222, 224, 227
[344] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 222
[345] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 224
[346] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 222

subsequent emergence of *kawaii* as an international ambassador of Japanese soft power repeats with difference s the transformation "*mus*" into "rat" as the meaning of each occurs through an extended, contingent process of palimpsestic layering in which things and words encounter, stick, separate, and bear the mark. Moreover, the discursive dimension of cute-*kawaii* handwriting resembles "The last Yes" of *Ulysses,*" which "only gives itself to be read since it is distinguished from others by an inaudible capital letter."[347] Read, in the loosest sense of "opposed to heard" since the capitalization is not comprehended, but apprehended—it halts rather than advances the logical structure of the sentence. It calls to the eyes to respond—to stop. It thus highlights the heightened interplay between legibility and illegibility that seems endemic to cute-*kawaii* things, and related to their appearing innocent (or not). Illegibility understood here as the appearing *as* intentional of a thing that makes it possible to read it *as* illegible, as *that which is or was possibly legible*: the seeming significant of what is not (or not yet, or not currently) a sign: the crossing out of the barely illegible swear word that makes legible two different intents.

It is this quality that might account for Brian McVeigh's conflation of Japanese *kawaii* with campiness despite Kinella's insistence that "there is no sense of camp in Japanese culture."[348] The disjunction between form and function, the seeming aesthetic excess of a "little, round, weeping digitalized vacuum cleaner" or a Tiffany lamp, characterizes both Sontag's camp and the cute-*kawaii*, and both seem to convey the

[347] Derrida, "*Ulysses*, Gramophone", 54
[348] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 228

sense of an attempt, an effort, or an *essay* at work, that fails or falls short. They differ, however, in that in its failure to become art the campy thing remains an object, while the cute-*kawaii*'s "failure...at the level of address," its inability to appear as a "a fully independent and separate entity capable of responding,"[349] nonetheless gives it the *appearance* of a subject. In the example of cute-*kawaii* handwriting, the hostility provoked by the childish, westernized style is not related to what any particular writer *meant* by it, but to what the *style itself might mean*—or fail to mean: to the possibilities of re-making meaning it exposed by *appearing as itself*. Not dismissing Kinsella's argument that the association of cute-*kawaii* handwriting with Western culture registered as a threat to Japanese national identity as embodied in the practice and tradition of written Japanese, there is also a sense in which the Western influence is incidental to the threat posed by child-writing.

In acting on their own authority to introduce these elements into Japanese, Kinsella argues that "young people had invented a new language in which they were suddenly able to speak freely," and "to have an intimate relationship with the text."[350] In putting into play basic elements of Japanese writing these students' cute-*kawaii* style opens the system of writing to alterity, most proximally Western alterities, but also *any* alterities. Thus, the incorporation of Western text, though ideologically laden, nonetheless functions in this context similarly to the smiley faces doodled beside them. While they confront the Japanese schoolteacher with the particular threat of a Western

[349] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 96, 97
[350] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 224

influence, at the same time they participate in the more general threat represented by the smiley face *appearing as a sign*—of something. That is to say, the threat of *meaning appearing spontaneously*, and the possibility of *creating meaning,* which exposes the vulnerability of all meaning to *spontaneously becoming illegible*.

The episode of cute-*kawaii* handwriting illustrates what Sianne Ngai describes as "*the centrality of discourse"* to the cute-*kawaii*, the way it "entails treating words like material things that it can use vigorously or even roughly," and makes language "more vulnerable" to both "deformation" and "transformation."[351] Describing the experience of cute-*kawaii* as "an encounter with difference that *does something* to everyday speech: weakening or even dissolving syntax and reducing lexicon to onomatopoeia" Ngai emphasizes the cute-*kawaii's* capacity to apparently *regress* language.[352] Widely documented, the regressive effect of cute-*kawaii* on language has generally been cited as evidence of its infantilizing effect, and characterized variously as "babbling," "lilting," "cooing," "twittering," "motherese," and in the Japanese context formally referred to as *burikko* (fake-child speech). However, what appears as regression is not necessarily so. While baby-talk might appear insipid when directed towards a pet or another adult, in the context of infant learning it appears the use of what researchers call 'motherese' facilitates the baby's imitation of human language. A "highly expressive, patterned, and repetitive way of speaking with exaggerated changes in pitch and intonation," motherese seems "designed to capture the babies' attention," and involves not just vocalization, but

[351] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 89
[352] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 88

"the babies' preferred...movements in their particular rhythm, pace, and intensity."[353][354] Thus, motherese/baby-talk appears not merely the adult's parodic imitation of the child's speech, but a process and a medium of coevolving communication.

Anna Gibbs extrapolates from motherese a theory of mimetic communication which is "not just a feature of mothers and babies," but involves the 'entrainment' of one person with another, as when someone's gestures and movements are synchronized with their speech, or when an attentive listener's...invisible movements are synchronized with the speech rhythms of the person to whom they are listening"[355]—or when a child mouths the words of his storybook as he struggles to read it silently. If we understand childishness in this way, the child-handwriting phenomenon suggests that the cute-*kawaii* additionally makes language more vulnerable merely to *appearing,* to *being formed* in the sense of generation or germination, or *forming itself*. In particular, it seems to overwhelmingly compel the formation of emotionally charged or *emotionally vulnerable* language. According to Ngai, the cute-*kawaii* appears to generate a compulsion specifically "to publicise or share ...feelings."[356] In the case of cute-*kawaii* handwriting, student testimony indicates that one purpose its innovation served was to enable them to "express their feelings to their friends more easily."[357] Cute-*kawaii* vocalization, meanwhile, induces exclamation, ejaculation, or interjection, apparently to register, *as if*

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[353] Anna Gibbs, "After Affect", 197
[354] Moreover, when psychologists reviewed footage of mothers and babies in slow motion they discovered "the babies' apparently random kicking and wriggling," adapted to "their mothers' rhythms." Ibid.
[355] Gibbs, "After Affect", 197
[356] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 60
[357] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", 224

immediately, the experience of feeling *in what appears as language* ("Ooo," "Aaa").

Consequently, the cute-kawaii manner of speaking in what appears as an affected child speech mirrors in voice the illegibility effect of cute-kawaii handwriting (its timbre resembling to some perhaps the scraping nails of rodents). In light of this, we might amend Ngai's statement to refer to the *centrality of the appearance, or the apparition, of discourse*—how it appears, or *that* it appears as discourse, as this or that *style* of discourse, as belonging to *this or that* discursive realm of human being. From the Latin *discursus* meaning "running to and fro", but derived from *dis*-, meaning "away", and *currere* ("to run"), "discourse" imputes to language the animated quality of cute-*kawaii,*—language as that which runs to and fro, when it isn't running away with itself *a la* Balla's "Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash"—and imputes to the cute-kawaii the centrality of local motion: that which runs to and fro necessarily returns, or remains; that which runs away necessarily begins near. The cute-*kawaii*, we might say, concerns the expressionless appearance of becoming animated *as* discourse—or of being animated *by intention*—or an appearance that moves us *to* discourse.

It is as a symmetry of being moved *to* and *by* discourse that the rat enters into Irish literary history. Sianne Ngai identifies one point of emergence for cuteness as the 19th and early 20th century baker's practice of selling "flat sugar dolls" made of excess dough to children. "Containing a 'motto,'" akin to a fortune cookie's fortune, these dolls form an "intersection of the poem, food, and simplified anthropomorphic figure."[358] The "grandfather rat" of *Ulysses* arrives at a similar intersection. In a subsection of the entry

[358] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 73

"Rhyming to Death" entitled "Irish rats rhymed to death," Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1898) describes the "once prevalent opinion," in Ireland, "that rats in pasturages could be extirpated by" the bardic practice of "anathematising them in rhyming verse or by metrical charms," a fact he notes as "frequently alluded to by ancient authors."[359] The most famous rat-slaying bard is the semi-mythical Senchán Torpéist, a 7th century Gaelic poet who upon discovering a gift of food devoured by rats declared "Mice, though sharp their snouts / Are not powerful in battles" and killed ten on the spot. "Mice," recalls that "rat" was an as of yet unavailable categorical distinction in Latin, English and Gaelic in the 7th century, and in turn previews the slippage to be suffered between the rats and the Irish. An 1853 meeting of the Royal Irish Academy on the subject of "Rhyming Rats to Death" highlights that "allusions to this peculiar superstition," were particularly prevalent among English "writers of the Elizabethan age, and the following century."[360] In *As You Like It* Rosalind mocks Orlando's amatory doggerel by saying, "I was neuer so berim[']d since…I was an Irish Rat,"[361] and in the epilogue to *Poetaster* Ben Jonson says of his critics he will "rhime them to death, as they do Irish rats."[362]

Though the Irish oppose the strength of poetic tradition to rats as something weak and cunning, the English associate Irishness, bad poetry and rats as things to be destroyed. Not coincidentally, the increased frequency of these allusions in the literary

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[359] E. C. Brewer, *Dictionary of. Phrases. & Fables*, 1040
[360] *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836–1869)*, 355
[361] Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* (1623) iii. ii. 173
[362] Jonson, *Poetaster*, "Epilogue to the Reader",

world corresponded with the advance of British colonialism in Ireland. In particular, "new views about civility...cartography, surveying, material culture," the cultivation of land, and "the threat posed by the barbarous customs of the Irish" enabled the English to develop the strategies of a rationalized, "civilizing" colonialism it would go on to deploy in the New world.[363][364] Reginald Scot's 1665 *Discoverie of Witchcraft* demonizes, genders, and primitivizes the Irish tradition, attesting the Irish "term one sort of their witches eye-biters, yea and they will not stick to affirm that they can rime either man or beast to death,."[365] and the association subsequently evolved and amplified. In 1776, "priest of the Roman Catholic Church, named John O'Mulconry," who was believed to possess the hereditary bardic power of banishing rats by satire" was accused of causing "train of rats, numbering hundreds of thousands, and crushing to the ground everything in the way of plant or shrub that opposed their progress," into to burying themselves "deep beneath" the sandbanks of the Shannon river.[366] Inspiring "wonder and fright" in onlookers, it was soon determined the young and able men of the congregation should go in a body...with spades, sticks, [and] hurlies... and kill and totally extirpate the colony of rats."[367] Irishness, Catholicism, superstition, and the preponderance of rats are linked in their opposition to the "young," "able," and anglicized protestant men who are justified in the extermination of the colony.

As postcolonial work on Irish modernism demonstrates, the revenants of

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[363] John Patrick Montaño, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland*, 3
[364] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 219-243
[365] Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcrafte*, 35
[366] *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836-1869)*, 363
[367] *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836-1869)*, 364

colonization remain a presence in Irish national consciousnesses well into the 20th century,[368] and the complex of rats, poetry, and national identity remain with it. In "Parnell's Funeral," for instance, following the declaration that "An age is the reversal of an age," W.B. Yeats invokes Ben Jonson's invocation of the rat when he invites his critics to "Come, fix upon me that accusing eye," writing: "I thirst for accusation. All that was sung. / All that was said in Ireland is a lie / Bred out of the contagion of the throng, / Saving the rhyme rats hear before they die."[369] In Yeats's poem the poetic power of the Irish to murder rats is restored as a symbol of Irish nationalist pride, and the oft-remarked association of rats with "contagion," is re-rendered as the propagandistic efforts of the "throngs."[370] However, as later critiques of Yeats as a fascist or proto-fascist suggest,[371][372] the adaptation of an English figure of colonized otherness in service of Irish nationalism risks merely re-creating the structure of domination it enables. Perhaps presciently then, Joyce problematizes the Irish conception of the dirty rat anathematic to poetry, and the English association of rats with disgust, otherness, and Irishness by enjoining the cute-*kawaii* to the rat, and jointly disentangling these from reified, conventional forms in order to demonstrate the historical and material contingency of meaning.

"Rat" first appears in *Ulysses* as merely a linguistic apparition. Walking on the beach in "Proteus," Stephen observes "These heavy sands are language tide and wind

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[368] Begam, *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, 1-18
[369] *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 237
[370] Ibid.
[371] Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats"
[372] Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism*

have silted here. And these, the stoneheaps of dead builders, a warren of weasel rats." While "language" metaphorizes "sands," the comparison between "stoneheaps" and "a warren of weasel rats" slips between the metaphorical and the literal. While the conjunction "and" beginning the next sentence prepares us to read it as an extension of the metaphor, but the use of the conjunction is inverted. The disjunctive effect of transitioning to a literal description is doubled in the ungrammatical use of "And" to begin the sentence, and echoed in the use of commas to further disjoint the parts of the fragment. It thus becomes unclear how "these," "stoneheaps," and "warren" are related, such that it is possible to read both "stoneheaps" and "warren" as either literal or metaphorical descriptions of "these" whose antecedent is logically "stoneheaps," but also conceivably sands. Arriving at "a warren of weasel rats" we find what appears to refer to a material phenomenon cannot be read literally in a strictly literal sense of the word since the phrase condenses a number of similar small animals ("warren" specifically referring to a rabbit's burrow).

Already then, "rat" appears in association with the cute-*kawaii*'s profligate, protean nature, the transformative power of discourse, and the risk of its running in a circle and away with itself. ("Proteus"). In its first in-person appearance at the very end of "Hades," he is heralded by the specter of "Parnell's Funeral," . And then, the rat is introduced to the novel as it is introduced to language: "Rtststr! A rattle of pebbles. Wait. Stop!"[373] The sound is a sign—the sound of writing that "rattles," something "moving pebbles." The association of the rat with the sound of its etymological origin appears to

[373] Joyce, *Ulysses*,

be deliberate. Throughout the novel the rat, particularized as “that rat,” “the rat,” or “grandfather rat,” appears alongside the meanings it inherits from its name. Writing, understood as a “scratching, tearing, or scraping,” invariably attaches itself to “that old grey rat.” In “Aeolus,” he appears “tearing to get in” to the *Freeman* newspaper offices, where the printing presses are “working away, tearing away” to print language. In “Sirens,” Bloom is prompted to “wonder where that rat is by now.” This thought is interrupted, and the paragraph concluded by a sound: “Scrape.”

Looking “intently” Bloom’s eyes “stop” on the figure of “some animal” : “An obese grey rat toddled along...An old stager: greatgrandfather.” Initially indeterminate, Bloom proceeds rapidly to anthropomorphism through a succinct re-staging of a human life cycle. Before he is named the rat is “obese,” fleshy (squishy) in a particularly human, and often moralized way. He then “toddles” like a child, and attains a profession as a “stager,” “a person who has become skilled or qualified by long experience,” or been long employed in an office, a profession, course of life.”[374] Afterwards, and through the remains of the novel, he is “greatgrandfather” rat. ‘Stager’ is an interesting choice of vocation. Used “occasionally of animals,” it also connotes ‘cunning’ and ‘sly,’ and in this case may incorporate the archaic meaning of “stage actor”—a proleptic gesture to a coming association between rats and Shakespeare, but also suggesting the imitation of human forms of the affects. The ontological indeterminacy of the rat proceeds from the human/animal and actual/simulated to the living and dead. Bloom observes “the grey alive [crush] itself under the plinth, [wriggle] itself under it.” The abstract aliveness of the

[374] "stager, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/188666

rat enacts a descent to the underworld, and causes Bloom to confuse the living animal with the dead man. Of the grave "where are laid the remains of Robert Emery," Bloom asks: "Who lives there?" The man's grave becomes the rat's home, the rat "who lives" becomes a pronominal "who"-man.

The rat exits the scene with a proleptic anthropomorphism. As he is swallowed by the earth ("Tail gone now"), Bloom ascertains he's "making his rounds." The phrase imputes meaning to the rat's activities consistent with his figuration as a "stager"—he pursues familiar, well-practiced paths. It also circles what the rat will circle back to—-what Anne Cheng cutely calls the "sushi principle," a quality "that reveals and revels in the conflation between *meat* and *flesh* at the multiple levels of consumption, aesthetics, and affect that...shed light on the larger issues of race and animality that are provoked by eating."[375] Cute-*kawaii*, regarded as an aesthetic of consumption, is strongly associated with both edibility[376][377] and the "marketing of racial difference,"[378] appears here strongly invested in the sushi principle, as it concerns the transformation of things from meat to flesh. Addressing the rat as a generic familiar, Bloom observes "One of those chaps would make short work of a fellow. Pick the bones clean no matter who it was." Converting consumption into labor, as the rat "works" to "pick the bones clean," Bloom neutralizes the human/non-human distinction by figuring as entwined the natural processes of death, decay, and survival. As Bloom thinks, a human corpse is "ordinary

[375] Cheng, "Sushi, Otters, Mermaids," 4
[376] Nadia de Vries, "Under the Yolk of Consumption: Re-Envisioning the Cute as Consumable"
[377] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 79
[378] Ngai,

meat" and "regular square feed" for his rat chaps. This prompts the ontological reversals of a "corpse" into "meat gone bad," and "cheese" into the "corpse of milk." The first substitutes a cultural for a biological prohibition against eating human flesh. The corpse is inedible not because it is human but because it has "gone bad." The second calls attention to the symbiosis between cuisine and putrescence. Described as the "eroticism of disgust" whiffed in "penetratingly smelly cheeses," Eugenie Brinkema identifies "a desirable element of the revolting" at work in the aesthetics of edibility. Rather than suppress appetite, disgust functions as its "supplementarity." The rats, worms, and bacteria at work in the decomposition of bodies and cheeses highlight the "interconnectedness between life and rot," the underlying material similarity that makes possible the edibility of rats, cheese, or corpses.

In keeping with the sushi principle, Bloom's train of thought blends differences between flesh and meat with differences in cultural perception and practice: "I read in that *Voyages in China* that the Chinese say a white man smells like a corpse." The divisions between human and non-human, Irish and other, become increasingly illegible here. That "a white man smells like a corpse," to the Chinese appears to figure them as rats, in keeping with the word's orientalist origins. However, because white men appear as corpses, and not as meat, a shared humanity is established which refers back to the "interconnectedness between life and rot." When he "[gets] wind of [the corpse of] Dignam," he observes "[rats] wouldn't care about the smell of it." He then assumes the rat's perspective and imagines "Saltwhite crumbling mush of corpse: smell, taste like raw white turnips." "Raw," rather than cooked human flesh is meat for the animal, but also

mineral, vegetable, and "mush." Open to the cute-*kawaii* rat the human form becomes ontologically indeterminate.

Questions of intimacy, community identity, difference, and the disgusting are transposed to the religious sphere in the next sentence. Having just attended the Catholic burial of Patty Dignam, Bloom privately reflects, "Cremation better," but "Priests dead against it." The question the cute-*kawaii* edible relates to the question of the corpse by way of contamination. The corpse embodies the "symbolic pollution of death" and requires the cultural apparatus of ritual to "domesticate" it in the same way smelly cheeses domesticate decay. However, Bloom converts the question of metaphysical and cultural difference into one of material medical practice. In the "time of the plague" (associated with the rat and the sea that supposedly brought it westward), Catholics resorted to "wholesale burners" and "quicklime feverpits" to purify the bodies of disease. Religious difference also announces the next appearance of "that rat." In "Sirens" Bloom is prompted to recall his chap by a performance of "The Croppy Boy," an 1840s ballad about a poor Catholic boy whose confession is betrayed by a British army captain disguised as a priest.[379] The passage opens: "Latin again." Associating it with Catholicism, Bloom refers Latin back to his experience as a Jewish witness to a Catholic funeral in "Hades." Latin thus differentially marks Bloom as Jewish, indexing his exterior position with regards to the Irish Catholic nationalist tradition.

Additionally, the Latin phrases interspersed in the section, "*in nomine Domini,*" "*mea culpa*," and "*corpusnomine*" relate it to the practices of identification,

[379] Mabel P. Worthington, "Irish Folk Songs in Joyce's *Ulysses,*" 321

classification, the subject, law, discipline, and punishment, which in contrast, “rat” and “scrape” resist. While “Latin” differentiates and encloses things, the unattributed “scrape” returns Bloom’s consciousness to the material presence of his environment, breaking the monologic stream. This distinction is echoed in the preceding transition from “*in nomine Domini*,” to “*corpusnomine*.” The former phrase, ritualized and integrated into a cultural structure, and formally, typographically conventional relates one indefinite particular, a name, to another, a deity; the latter, its pieces pushed together, relates the indefinite particular name to what is conventionally understood as a condition or category—a corpses, or corpses. While persons have names, and may have corpses, corpses possess neither being an object-condition in relation to particular subjects. The association of the particular name with the categorical corpse produces a disjunction, a formal weakness, that enables Bloom the opening “to wonder,” about that rat.

In other instances, this opening yields to or indexes the poetic capacities of language. In “Lestrygonians” Bloom imagines the inside of a brewery, the “vats of porter wonderful.” Wonder is persistently associated with the rat which is the object of Bloom’s wondering, and we should recall a constitutive aspect of the cute-*kawaii* formulated as “wondrous innocence.” The next sentence declares “Rats get in.” Bloom imagines they “drink themselves bloated big as a collie floating,” and to himself thinks “Imagine drinking that! Rats: vats.” Rhyming ‘that,’ ‘rat,’ and ‘vat,’ Bloom observes “that is how poets write, the similar sounds”. This simple observation is then immediately placed into the contexts of national identity and British colonialism. Bloom contradicts himself, “But then Shakespeare has no rhymes,” calling to mind the English association of Irishness,

savagery, and bad rhyming poetry (but also the non-rhyming poetry of Japan). The context furthermore underlines that "similar sounds" are produced more easily within a language and a culture, than between languages and cultures. The next sentence, "The flow of the language *it is*" ("So be it!") may be read either as an affirmation or a contradiction, leaving Bloom's relationship to these exteriorities unresolved. ("Sirens").

In "Oxen in the Sun," where Joyce enacts the evolution of the English language, the entanglement of language, colonialism, and identity reappears. In seeming reference *The Tempest*, cursing appears as an opening for the voice of the "nocturnal rat," who "peers from his hole," in the "uninhabited...house by the graveyard." Joyce writes: "A curse is on it. It is haunted." The "curse" on the rat and the house evokes Caliban's rebuke of Prospero: "You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse."[380] In "Circe" the specter of Bloom's dead father Virag uses "Rats!" as an expletive interjection in response to Bloom's Elizabethan rhyme: "Thine heart, mine love...When first I saw…" In "Scylla and Charybdis," Stephen curses Shakespeare, murderer of Irish rats, as a "Patsy Caliban," a phrase adjoining the image of "Irishman as imbecile and that of colonized savage,"[381] and linking "Amerindia with Catholic Ireland in a common history of cultural invasion."[382] The "curse" upon "it," ambiguously the rat, its hole, and the house is a response to and from what has been excluded from a language now "inhabited" by another—the figures of the Irish, of rats.

'It' confuses the uninhabited and its un-inhabitant, and calls into question how the

[380] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I. ii. 366–367
[381] Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism*, 63
[382] L.H. Platt, "The Voice of Esau: Culture and Nationalism in 'Scylla and Charybdis," 745

house comes to appear "uninhabited," who or what qualifies as an inhabitant. The logic of capitalist colonialism, which understands habitation as a property right rather than a relation of peoples to their environment, often figures a land as "uninhabited," "uncivilized," and "uncultivated,"[383] in order to justify its expropriation. It is an instance of what Mark Fisher describes as a "negative hallucination." In contrast to ordinary hallucination in which we perceive what is absent, a negative hallucination is a failure to perceive what is present. "Objects are registered," which is to say they affect us, but "not seen."[384] In contrast to amnesia or disassociation, which produce "a gap that is perceived and felt" in consciousness, a negative hallucination functions as "a gap which conceals itself.[385] It is an "involuntary process of overlooking material which contradicts dominant stories we tell ourselves" in order to preserve coherent identity.[386] Fisher's example is the "heavy material infrastructure" of a shipping port, which despite its massy immensity, "facilitates the illusion of a 'de-materialized' capitalism."[387] The port enables and conceals capitalism's continued reliance on exploited human labor, causing the foreign worker's body to disappear as a function of the port's appearing as "the triumph of finance capital."[388] The historical processes that caused *mus* to appear as the orientalized, othered "rat" seem to also involve a capacity for "negative hallucination," since it concerns how what was absent came to register as an overdetermined presence. Another meaning of "stager" in use in the 1920s was, co-incidentally, "A person who erects

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[383] Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 23
[384] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 74
[385] Ibid.
[386] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 75
[387] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 77
[388] Ibid.

scaffolding in a shipyard."[389]

Disneyland also appears to deploy a strategy of "negative hallucination" both in its use of and its capture of cute-*kawaii* affect. One aim of its rigidly controlled environment is to thoroughly scrub the material world of potential contaminants. Literally, "the usual mess that [accompanies] horse drawn carriages is missing," but more abstractly, "the labor of keeping things clean is always conspicuous by its absence or camouflaging."[390] When one does glimpse sanitation work it is absorbed into the fantasy of play in a "whistle-while-you-work exhibition," as the sanitation workers are "performers in their own right who entertain those who watch them clean."[391] Aesthetic cuteness disguises capitalism's exploitation, and it does so by the condensation of potential supplement into the aestheticization. The acute pathos of watching someone scoop manure on a hot day in a crowded theme park is aestheticized into a "cute" performance of scooping. The innocent observation that both cleaning and performing are labor is annulled in advance by the total scripting of the park such that genuine response is impossible—these aren't sanitation workers, they're 'cast members.'

The rat next appears in "Circe," the apotheosis of cute-*kawaii* profligacy. As the now seemingly living corpse of Paddy Dignam "worms down through a coathoale his brown habit trailing its tether over rattling pebbles," the "obese grandfather rat on fungus turtle paws under a grey carapace" "toddles after." The dead man and the rat (amongst other things) exchange, or combine properties. Paddy Dignam "rattles" the pebbles, and

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[389] "stager, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press,
[390] Salamone, "Images of Main Street," 86
[391] Ibid.

his habit's tether resembles the rat's tail in Hades. Whereas in "Hades" the earth swallowed the rat, the rat here pursues a corpse to swallow. The roles reverse again, and the circle circles back to the sushi principle in "Eumaeus." Resting in the cabman's shelter after having been debauched in "Circe," Bloom and Stephen listen to a sailor recount: "—I seen a Chinese one time...that had little pills like putty and he put them in the water and they opened and every pill was something different. One was a ship, another was a house, another was a flower." Edible, transformable, wonderfully kitschy, and exotic these "little pills like putty" begin to resemble the standardized commodity cute-*kawaii* of the post-war period. The sailor then "appetisingly" adds, "Cooks rats in your soup...the chinks does."

The narrator's use of "appetisingly" is "cute" in the sense of "cunning, or sly," the kind of bashful, daring naughtiness with which preteen boys use slurs—the same way in which the sailor appears to "relate" this fact. Bringing to the fore the "twinning demands of aesthetics and corporeality, metaphor and literalness, animality and civilization"[392] which have accompanied the cute-*kawaii* rat his appearance as soup "impacts and troubles the ontological borders of its consumers,"[393] whether of soup or appearance. Figured variously as Irish, Jewish, Chinese, animal, and grandfather, but reduced here to meat (as the Chinese are reduced to "chinks") the cooked rat indexes instability of appearing as human—as being able to *suffer from* being consumed. Reinforcing this is the description of the sailor as "doughty," which has a triple meaning. Literally "brave,"

[392] Cheng, "Sushi, Otters, Mermaids," 3
[393] Cheng, "Sushi, Otters, Mermaids," 6

with reference to his occupation, it also ironically refers to his "persistence" in the face of Bloom and Stephen's "dubiosity," which is ambiguously the result of willful ignorance as regards their discomfort. Lastly, in proximity with edibility "doughty" appears as a pun on "doughy," which I interpret as an ironic undermining of the sailor's dehumanizing rhetoric. "Brave" enough to share his view with those he "relates" to, assured of their being prohibited from eating him, the language notes the latent possibility of the sailor's being eaten.

The first and last appearances of "cute" in Joyce's modernist *mirabilio* herald and adjoin a number of the tropes that will come to define cute-*kawaii*'s characterization in the post-war, postmodern era. In "Calypso," as he is walking to the butcher for breakfast, Bloom passes O'Rourke's pub and contemplates soliciting its owner: "Baldhead over the blind. Cute old codger. No use canvassing him for an ad." While Bloom's use is consistent with "cute's" older meaning of cunning, the passage assembles a number of contemporary associations, many of which refrain with the rat. The "grandfather" rat who "toddles" collapses the cute dependency of infancy with the less oft-noted cute infirmity of old age. Appearing first as a "baldhead over the blind," invoking a child emerging from the womb, Larry O'Rourke is an "old codger," a phrase which is either an oxymoron or a tautology depending on how and who uses it. It may designate an "old man," either denigratingly or with the intent to "playfully express affection, compassion"[394] in which case Bloom calls him an "old old man." There are additionally, however, two region specific uses of "codger" in play. In *English regional* and *Irish*

[394] "codger, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press

English a "codger" is "an unpleasant (old) man, esp. one who is...strange in behaviour or appearance...a pedlar, tramp, or beggar."[395] In *Irish English* and *North American*, a "codger" is a term of endearment for "a child, or young person."[396] The cute-*kawaii* of Larry O'Rourke, like that of the rat, involves an indeterminacy of what appears as in relation to context, "codger" condensing a number of contradictions which appear through the differential and culturally specific use of language. As with the rat, the appearance of cute immediately opens into questions of consumption, nationality, and identity. Bloom overhears Mr. O'Rourke tell Simon Dedalus, "Do you know what? The Russians, they'd only be an eight o'clock breakfast for the Japanese."

In "Circe" an apparition of the prophet Elijah commands Bloom, Stephen, and the prostitutes of nighttown: "no yapping...join on right here...it's just the cutest snappiest line out. It is immense, supersumptuous. It restores. It vibrates...The hottest stuff that ever was. It's the whole pie with jam in." Here, "cutest" appears to be its contemporary form, as in the ejaculation "What cute, little socks!" but raised to a theological intensity. Rather than small, it is "immense." The "warmth of intimacy and friendship"[397] cute-*kawaii* affords is "the hottest stuff that ever was." Silenced by Elijah, humanity becomes cute-*kawaii*. They are swept into cute-*kawaii*'s "innocence of becoming." Elijah asks his congregation, "Are you a god or a doggone clod?" He later enjoins them, "Be on the side of the angels. Be a prism." What appears in the first instance as a hierarchical differentiation between the good "god" and "doggone clod," the heavenly body and a

[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Allison, *Millennial Monsters*, 13

lump of clay, is synthesized in the image of the "prism" as a "clod-god," the embodied appearance of a divine quality. However, no part of the equation is stable. Transformation is a "nonstop" run.

Like the cute child Elijah is naught but nice; he swears, but he does not take the lord's name in vain. Elijah curses the clod, "doggone." He uses a childish euphemism for "goddamn," which transforms the deity into a dog by means of language's material manipulation, producing slant rhymes. "The epitome of cute," being an undifferentiated blob of soft doughy matter," the formless lump of the "clod" exhibits profligacy prior to this transformation. In the Judeo-Christian context, "clod" is used to refer to the human body in reference to God's creation of mankind out of the dirt, a relation indexed in "Adam," which in Hebrew all at once denotes the proper noun of the Bible, the earth (*adamah*) from which he is made, and "human being, mankind collectively"—a meaning which returns in the alternate definition of "clod" as "a substance without plural."[398] The play between particular and universal, individual and collective, and singular plural at work in the *kyarakuta* is also at work here. The universal "clod" is transformed by Elijah into particular instances of a universal "christ." Employing the word apparently as synonym for the title and role of messiah, rather than in reference to Jesus, Elijah christens his audience: "Florry Christ, Stephen Christ, Zoe Christ, Bloom Christ, Kitty Christ, Lynch Christ." Syncretizing and democratizing, he tells them "you can rub shoulders with a Jesus, a Gautama."

"Rat" and "Cute" coincide exactly twice in *Ulysses*, back to back in "Sirens" and

[398] "clod, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press,

"Cyclops," at the intersection of appeal and disgust where we began our discursis. In "Sirens" the phrase "cute as a rat" assembles the associations of the sly and cunning, with the loveable and touchable, in a scene of writing, suspicion, deception, and appeal. Attempting to surreptitiously follow Blazes Boylan to the Ormond (where Boylan will *ren de vouz* with Molly Bloom, and Bloom will wonder about "that rat") Bloom thinks, "Hope he's not looking, cute as a rat." To conceal himself from his potential cuckolder Bloom "[unfurls] his *Freeman*" (the nationalist newspaper that employs Bloom as an ad man, where that rat is "tearing"), and as Bloom disappears so too does Boylan. "Can't see now," Bloom observes. The transformations of subject and object position Bloom subjects himself to—being who sees, who can be seen, and who imagines who can see—are condensed in the analogy which confers undecidably to either Bloom or Boylan the cuteness of the rat, itself undecidably attractive, revolting, cunning and innocent.

Bloom in this instance is "cute" in the sense of "cunning" (befitting the modern incarnation of "cunning Odysseus"), but also in the broader sense of possessing a playful, empathetic disposition which causes his cunning to be innocent, if exasperating—as when he defines a nation as "the same people living in the same place...or also in different places" to the ridicule of the Irish nationalists in "Cyclops." Additionally, Bloom assumes the cute's femininity in "by transforming bodily into a woman in "Circe." Boylan is cute in the same way—he is cunning, he conceals—but also in a different way. Whereas Bloom is the new "womanly man," Boylan is classically virile. He is "cute" in the contemporary sense of "sexy," embodying what Michael DeAngelis describe as the connection between cuteness, sexiness, and "the contours of softness and

hardness in both the male body itself and the discourse that culturally defines this body."[399] Drawing on contemporary images of buff men posing with baby animals he identifies a "dynamics of desire" activated "by juxtaposing the soft, furry animal with the smooth, contoured, hard body of a man who nurtures and protects that vulnerable creature while simultaneously rendering *himself* vulnerable to the lure of the viewer's look…how he is perceived, consumed, or interpreted" that describes "cute as a rat" Boylan just as well.[400]

Interposing the nationalist newspaper (associated with the aggressive masculinity of "Cyclops'" nationalists) between himself and Boylan, Bloom causes to disappear not just the body of Boylan, but Boylan as Bloom imagines he appears to Molly: "sexy," but also someone who "nurtures and protects." When Boylan reappears in "Circe" it is not merely as Molly's lover, but the father and caretaker of her child. The vulnerability of the lover's look that constitutes masculine cute-*kawaii* redounds from Boylan to Bloom who fails to appear as masculine even as he appears to be caring. This parallel between Boylan and Bloom is underlined by the note Bloom has scribbled to his telegram mistress, Martha Clifford, which appears as he unfurls his paper. He addresses her by pet name, "dear Mady." She knows him by his pseudonym "Henry Flowers." The distinction between cute-*kawaii* intimacy and cute-*kawaii* cunning maps onto the distinction between the pet name and the pseudonym, and collapses it. "Mady's" pet name no more secures her intimacy with Bloom than "Poldy's" secures his with Molly.

[399] DeAngelis, "Soft and Hard: Post-Millennial Cuteness," 196
[400] DeAngelis, "Soft and Hard: Post-Millennial Cuteness," 203

The transformation from confidant to conspirator is mediated by the material transformation of writing. Reminding himself to "write Greek ees. Bloom dipped, Bloo mur: dear sir. Dear Henry wrote." His name first decomposes into "Bloo mur," conjuring women's undergarments, and then is rhymed with "dear sir," before he emerges the addressee "Dear Henry" who can write to Mady: "Got your lett and flow...It is utterl imposs. Underline *imposs*. To write today." As with cute-*kawaii* handwriting the meaning of the "lett" is the stye with which it appears, the transformations it undergoes as it appears. The deformations of Bloom's language, its fragmentation in his carelessness or haste, underlines that it is not impossible to write, but that Bloom is unwilling to say why he won't write. Again the metaphorical and literal coincide, and disjoin. The "lett and flow" which recalls the "flow of language" from "Lestrygonians" is halted by the disappearance of Martha's letter ("Hell did I put it?" Bloom wonders), and resumes to utter "it is utterl imposs." The "l" becomes unreadable in the absence of the "y," a becoming silent that describes the impasse of utterance jumbled into its comprehending phrase. Woven together is the muteness of writing which in the style of its material presence conveys a sense of intensive experience which appears as innocent, with the appearing and disappearing as cunningly-caring appeal of Boylan and Bloom.

These dynamics of desire invert into repulsion in the next episode, which begins almost immediately after the events of "Sirens," but it is told in the past tense by one of the Irish nationalists who antagonize Bloom. The tendrils of disgust, cuteness, seeing-as, gender, and nationalism weave together when the narrator of "Cyclops" anti-semitically

exclaims, “There’s a jew for you!...Cute as a shithouse rat.”[401] Because disgust, like the cute-*kawaii*, appears to intensify or transform into other emotions, “the subject may experience hate towards...as well as fear of the object” of disgust[402] Thus rats figured as vermin become vehicles for cultural suspicion of the other as contagious. The suspicious conflation of Jewish Leopold Bloom with the rat refers us back to the indeterminacy of their domestication by human and nation. Now seen from the point of view of the privileged position of masculinity, Catholicism, and Irishness, cute-kawaii rat Bloom appears as feminine weakness, and threatening to transmit his weakness to the Irish. When the leader of the nationalists, the citizen, criticizes the British navy’s use of corporal punishment Bloom wonders, “isn’t discipline the same everywhere. I mean wouldn’t it be the same here if you put force against force?” His innocent question is met with the assertion, “We’ll put force against force,” and later “with force like men.”

Here “cute” implies a cunning or duplicitousness which makes thinkable parasitism, the possibility that the adorable other is only acting innocently, as when Montaigne observes the uncanny possibility that his cat plays with him, or when the staged dependency of a cute commodity gives way to “the angry sense that one is being exploited or deceived.”[403] Born in Ireland, Bloom appears to the narrator as a “[stranger] in our house,” “swindling the peasants,” and “filling the country with bugs.”[404] In the shadow of anti-Semitism negative hallucinations appear. In parallel with the English

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[401] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 326
[402] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 88
[403] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 24
[404] Joyce, *Ulysses*, 310

disappearance of *rattus rattus,* the English-aligned Irish schoolmaster of "Telemachus" disappears Irish Jews. He jokes to Stephen that "Ireland...has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the jews...Because she never let them in." In "Cyclops" the narrator likewise disappears the association of Irishness and rats in his attribution of its cuteness to Bloom, disappearing with it the association between Irishness and the play of language that might legitimate Bloom's Irish identity. Lastly, the epithet "shithouse rat" is prefaced "your pockets hanging down with gold and silver." Bloom notes of that rat's "hole" when he is introduced in "Hades," that it is a "Good hidingplace for treasure." Stephen similarly observes of the "warren of the weasel rat," that one could "Hide gold there."

What could effectively be the same content is expressed with three radically different effects. Bloom's "good hiding" assumes the subject position of the rat's ongoing efforts to hide, in which "good" doesn't designate a moral but a practical judgment. "Treasure," then, is an open-ended figure of value that retains the uncertainty of what a rat might "treasure," while also being a little precious. Stephen makes a (in)determinate judgment about what the "warren" is, and imagines a possibility for its use in the future. This seemingly neutral observation in which the feminine, maternal space of a small, furry animal is converted into the burial plot of non-denominated "gold," both recalls that Hades is the god of the dead and of all the earth's precious metals and gems, and discloses a link between these observations and his ruminations throughout the episode on his mother's death. What appears as valuable vanishes into base valuelessness. For the narrator of "Cyclops," the rat's hole appears as Bloom's pockets, now "hanging down."

The transformation from concave emptiness to convex bulging registers a transition from a "feminized" empathic relation to a masculinized relation to force as rat-Bloom's womanly hole becomes a kind of pseudo-testes.

Figuring Bloom as masculine, in contraindication to how Bloom appears throughout the novel, the narrator seems to assume that Bloom, "like men," operates according to a logic of "force against force" in spite of Bloom's bumbling, flustered protestations that "Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life," that what is really life is "Love, the opposite of hate." Thus the narrator figures Bloom's duplicitous pseudo-testicles as "gold and silver," incorporating into the refrain the currency of Christ's betrayal by Judas, and the Catholic church's canonical belief (as of 1922) that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. "Hiding" becomes the "hidden" of stolen goods, the desire to defraud which is hidden behind the false front of masculinity, Irishness, good-will, etc. The cause for suspicion is the belief, informed by anti-Semitism, that Bloom has won a bet "Hundred to five," but because he is "mean" ("cheap") he won't "stand us a drink." As with the rat's "obesity" what appears as a bulging in Bloom's pocket is moralized as in excess of what he deserves, or what he needs. Othered as a Jew, figured as a rat, the narrator causes Bloom to appear as in debt of the real Irishmen, as having deprived them of value or resources for which they should be compensated. Watching "old sheepsface" Bloom flee the citizen's "bloody mongrel," in pursuit "for all he was bloody well worth to tear [Bloom] limb from limb," the narrator exclaims "Hundred to five! Jesus, he took the value of it out of him." The

conflation of flesh and meat returns with a difference, as the narrator makes fungible not just meat and flesh, but meat, flesh, money, and the body of the other. Swindled out of an imagined debt, he imagines a pound of Bloom's flesh appropriate recompense.

With pet rats there remains always the possibility that it is not they who have been domesticated, that, swindled, it is the human who is being used. It is the illegibility of their nervousness or their savagery, the conjunction of their apparent cleverness with the liberal abjection of their bowels, and the possibility of our intimacy being fabricated (by them) that animates the appearing innocently expressionless of my pet rats.[405] In an encounter with what Donna Harraway calls "significant otherness," I suffer from "feeling disarmed before the small, mute, living being" they are.[406] Our relationship is not strictly defined by their dependency. Though I have made myself responsible for their food and shelter, I am not required for their survival (nor they for mine). Neither is our relationship predicated on fantasies of either pure innocence or unconditional love. Each of us appears at times to want something from the others, often something at odds with what the others want (they want to play when I want to sleep), and so we establish ourselves "as something other than the reflection of one's intentions."[407] They are cutest (to me) when my perception of them apprehends the unaccountable alienness of their bodily gestures. I take pleasure in the flick of their tails and the perk of their ears because they seem to express to me the simple pleasure of a treat or the trepidation of being touched; I am resigned to being occasionally bitten likewise because it seems (I see-it-as) the justifiable

[405] Basil (2019-2021), Osmond (2019-2021), Philomeides "Philo" (2020-), Uta (2020-2021)
[406] Derrida, *The Animal Therefore I Am,* 388
[407] Harraway*, The Companion Species Manifesto*, 27

nervousness of a prey animal. It is this semblance of expression that cannot (as of yet) amount to a full expression in human meaning that constitutes the expressionlessness of the cute-kawaii most generally—an expressionlessness that nonetheless invites us to "imagine the rest," the fullness of what they might mean if they were meant. What I apprehend as gestures cannot be fixed through discourse, only more or less approximated as discursive through further inscrutable gestures, each instance of which appears as innocent in the absence of meaning to.

Thus, I argue that we respond with almost spiritual reverence to the formal simplicity of cute-kawaii things because it indexes and affectively undoes the limit between human and nonhuman intention and expression, that signals potential expression, intention, or appeal prior to any conceptual comprehension of the thing expressed or expressing. Entrainting and encoding other affects, cute-kawaii attunes us to potential "human" expressivity and intentionality regardless of the species or substance of the affect's origin. Consequently, the domain of cute-kawaii affect is coextensive with any form—facial, gestural, temporal, verbal, or tonal—that *seems* to convey 'human' intent or expression prior to intellectual comprehension of human actors; and one way to formulate its ethical import would be to define it as the intuition of human being *being* entangled with non-human being, attended by a sense of duty to that entanglement. Consequently, the experience of cute-kawaii affect *tends to* promote an animist sensibility in which nonhuman being is felt to be ontologically entangled with its O/others. In this sense, cute-kawaii is an affective practice of what Donna Harraway describes as "humusity" a revision of the human self-conception that she opposes to a

traditional, totalizing Western “anthropos.” Humusity conceives of human being as tentacular or tendrilled, intimately and recursively entangled with the nonhuman.

CHAPTER THREE

INNOCENCE IN PLAY: A CUTE-*KAWAII* ETHOS OF NON-JUDGMENT

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Figures of innocence and figures of cute-*kawaii* can appear so inextricable from each other that it is tempting to read cute-*kawaii* as merely the aestheticization of an abstract innocence. This is most evident in their mutual associations with childishness and femininity, but extends even to the realm of the non-human, as the innocence of the natural world is taken to distinguish it from the moral culpability of human agents. Philosopher Norvin Richards suggests "When it comes to cruelty there are a number of things tigers cannot do because tigers cannot even think of them."[408] In killing a child a tiger would remain innocent because it cannot conceive of the killing *as* killing. Innocent, it only eats. Derrida brings the incipient cuteness of the tiger to the fore when he describes the animal in the tradition of philosophy as a "perverse beast, at one and the same time innocent, crafty, and evil."[409] Derrida also suggests the cute-*kawaii*, the animal and the innocent share the same position with regards to language: a solicitous, uncanny muteness. Nature and animality are inflicted with "the wound without a name: that of having been given a name," and thus "deprived of language," they "[lose] the power to name, to name oneself, indeed to answer for one's name."[410] Arising from within the same Western philosophical and religious tradition as the cute-*kawaii* animal it inscribes,

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[408] Richards, "Innocence," 158
[409] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 407-408
[410] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* 19

innocence is "preliterate," and "cannot speak for itself."[411] Consequently "the attribution of innocence...can be delivered only from an outside and privileged perspective."[412] This "outside and privileged perspective" that can name innocence (as cute-kawaii) is always excluded from being present as [an] innocent, and as such derives and defines itself from relation to what it has the power to name.

From the Latin "to do no harm," but soon acquiring the secondary meaning of "blameless [in doing harm]," in the West "innocence" has been from the 18th century on endlessly racialized, gendered, domesticated, idealized, animalized, and infantilized. The association of innocence with childhood begins as a Romantic response to the Enlightenment. Writers such as Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Blake figure the child as near divinity, free from the contamination of social confines, perfectly natural, and at one with creation. Thus, innocence, as it applied to children, begins "as an inversion of Enlightenment virtues, and is strangely hollow from the start," defined as "*un*corrupted, *un*sophisticated, *un*enlightened."[413] Kincaid's argument echoes and extends Cross's assessment that 20th century's cute-*kawaii* innocence is both "empty of positive meaning" and "so alluring that it has become intertwined with much that seems to be the very opposite of innocence."[414] By the 20th century children have become, Kincaid argues, "strange, mysterious, and ungraspable...both radiant, and oddly repellant, the object of fawning and not-so-secret resentment."[415] The oscillation between

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[411] Braudy, "Genres of Nature: Ceremonies of Innocence," 278-310
[412] Daniel R. DeNicola, *"Innocence and Ignorance*," 54
[413] James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, 53-54
[414] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool,* 6
[415] James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, 53-54

sentimentalized emptiness, profanity, and resentment already begins to resemble "The sentimentality of cuteness," that Ngai describes as "cut with a streak of anti-sentimentality,"[416] adjoining the sympathetic with the repulsive. Accordingly, Kinsella describes the cute-*kawaii* as a "style derived from adults (and children) *pretending* to be childlike" that involves "not so much real childish behavior...as the idolised childlikeness described in the neo-Romantic tradition."[417]

Cross conceives of cute-*kawaii* innocence along the line of moral philosophers as the absence of sufficiently realistic concepts both broadly, and with regard to moral responsibility. Innocence becomes attached to children because they do not yet know the world is a disenchanted late capitalist profit mechanism. Thus, they still display wondrous delight at Christmas gifts, Halloween costumes (and candy), and puppies. The rational adult, educated in life, *knows* enough not to wonder about who gives presents and how puppies are made. Evoking the Blakean dichotomy, innocence has been defined as an "unawareness deriving from inexperience," a form of "conceptual inadequacy" in which insufficient experience results in an insufficiently "realistic conception"[418] of moral responsibilities. This includes not only concepts such as "innocence" and "guilt," but "self-understanding" and "an understanding of those whose world is more complicated, thanks to their involvement in and awareness of the varieties of human failings"[419] i.e., capacities for self-reflection and empathy. This form of rigidly

[416] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 60
[417] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 240
[418] Richards, "Innocence" 158, 161
[419] Elizabeth Wolgast, "Innocence," 304

conceptualized innocence is associated, as is cute-kawaii, with an excessive passivity that amounts to intellectual "laziness" in adults, with whom we are rightfully "exasperated," but a fundamental "inability to do"[420] wrong in children. As a constitutive aspect of cute-*kawaii* however, "innocence" appears both in an ideologically "stuck" mode wherein it is locked into particular forms and bodies, and an anarchic, affective mode that is merely appearing *as if* (an) innocent.

"Innocence," as it belongs to cute-*kawaii* does not accord with the contents of its defined *concept*, but the *trace* that is an intuition of the possibility of its concept: not "actual" innocence, but virtual innocence, "where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt."[421] If cute-kawaii expands our moral circle, as Sherman and Haidt argue, it might also decenter it. While we should regard cute-kawaii's weakening of moral judgment warily, I want to highlight how cute-*kawaii*'s ethos of non-judgment might ground its utopian ethical potential. Cute-*kawaii* innocence describes an asymmetry both cannot judge and cannot be judged because the knowledge conditions for either mode cannot be satisfied. Because it affects a style of human-suffering-experience, cute-*kawaii* does not gauge the morality of violence but its potential *meaning*, and what can be inferred about the ideological and material circumstances at work in its illegibility. Seen in light of the child's shifting valuation in the early 20th century, May contends "instead of appearing predominantly as a flight from the challenges of adult life, or as manipulation of the innocent, cute can also be understood as a way of evoking, thematizing, and prizing" the

[420] Richards, "Innocence," 163, 166
[421] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 91

appearance of innocence a "sacrosanct embodiment of the human."[422] Cute-*kawaii* innocence unsettles the common assumption that innocence entails a childish lack of experience improper to adults. This conceptualization is produced by the habitual thinking of adult experience as settled—as thoroughly habituated—and conceptualization as proper knowledge of an object. Rather than "wondrous innocence," the innocence of cute-*kawaii* might be figured as "innocent wonder" in that it functions as a mode of apprehension resistant to knowing and conceptualizing objects.

Furthermore, conceived of as "innocent wonder" rather than "wondrous innocence," the cute-*kawaii* appears playful and open, rather than cloying. As film scholar David Whitley suggests," play has a strong association with childhood innocence conceived as an active quality," rather than an "unworldly powerlessness" or an "inherent vulnerability."[423,424] Rather than the automatic reaction of an ignorant child, the wondrousness of innocence has to do with the play of *wondering*, as in the childish "persistence in asking questions about troubled aspects of the world which adults have learned to accept and suffer."[425] It is a mode of active unknowing that follows the movement of acuity rather than pulling away, playing with the supplement that permeates the sanctity of a concept, contaminating itself, and recognizing non-identities. In the experience of cute-kawaii we attend to what *is*, as well as what *could be*, what else what

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[422] May, *The Power of Cute*, 149
[423] David Whitley, "Learning with Disney: Children's Animation and the Politics of Innocence," 80
[424] "as developed through consumer goods, *kawaii* "takes childhood as only a starting point. Innocence...becomes the raw materials from which to develop more complex, multilayered imagery...*kawaii*...includes cute and its distancing through...the framework of *asobi* (play)." Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 59
[425] Whitley, "Learning with Disney: Children's Animation and the Politics of Innocence," 84

is *is*. Playful innocence represents the winking, teasing intuition of its own conceivable universality. This possibility of the cute-*kawaii* will be illustrated first through a genealogical review of the historical relationship between the cute-*kawaii* and innocence, and then by juxtaposing readings of Carson McCullers *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Junichrio Tanizaki's *Naomi* to demonstrate how 20th century cute-*kawaii* unsettles concepts of innocence defined by weakness, and prompts a response-able playfulness.

The historical disjunction between the affective (acute) and the aesthetic (cute) modes of cute-*kawaii* in the early 20th century coincides with a destabilization of the figures of child and mother as vehicles for "innocence," "sincerity," or "purity." Both Cross and May observe that the cute-*kawaii* emerges from a "revolution in the valuation of childhood and in the treatment of children" that begins "around the 1850s" and continues "to the 1930s," A period bookended by the Opening of Japan and the beginning of World War II. In the middle of the 19th century children were subject to both "heavy manual labor and unremarked sexual abuse," and generally conceived of as either "deficits (burdensome expenses" or investments (future helpers and workers)."[426] At the beginning of the 20th, the cute-*kawaii* "look of wondrous innocence" appears as an effect of the transformation of the child from economic to emotional investment, becoming "economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless'"[427] as they assume the function of meeting "the deep emotional, even spiritual needs, of parents,"[428] dissipating the anxiety and boredom that besets adults as a consequence of modernity's pace of innovation. The

[426] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 30
[427] May, *The Power of Cute*, 145
[428] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 30

familial dynamic that results is one mediated by commodity fetishism, and maintained by its disavowal: a neo-Romantic construction of childhood innocence that is defined as the absence of contaminating (economic, erotic) influence and the simultaneous, explicit or implicit exposure to that influence.

Thus, in 20th century America "adults use children to awaken their desire for desire itself in a consumer culture that ironically suppresses desire by its constant attempts to awaken and expand it."[429] The look of wondrous innocence elicited by the giving of commodities on contemporary holidays reproduces and naturalizes constructions of childhood, children, and innocence that are ideologically entangled with consumption and subjectivity under late stage industrial capitalism. The adult who gives [commodities] to get [cute-*kawaii* affect] from children is also a subject constructed through and by innocent-appearing consumption. As an earlier understanding of children as essentially "miniature adults" to be put to work, was superseded by an conception of children as innocents the "special recognition accorded to childhood in industrial societies has served to isolate children from adults."[430] This production of difference is most marked in "the manufacture in the nineteenth century of 'the parent,' an entity dependent on and subordinate to the preexisting (although also recently fabricated) 'child.'"[431] "A wobbly and comic idea," Kincaid argues that the production of 'parent' as an identity and social role is an attempt by the subject to "assert what it manifestly does

[429] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 31
[430]Jeremy Lane Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 5
[431] James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, 68

not possess: sovereign power."[432] If, "childhood is the new locus of the sacred—and so the place where...we most readily find desecration,"[433] the affective mode of cute-*kawaii* involves the desecration of the adult as capable of knowing and judging, but also the possibility of an innocent desecration.

While in the Japanese context "the conception of the child as a being whose existence is separate and distinct from that of the adult world"[434] pre-exists the introduction of modern capitalism, the transformations it undergoes in the 19th and 20th centuries suggest similar dynamics at work. In the animist tradition of Shinto "a child became truly human only at the age of seven," before which they were considered a "*marebito,* a divine visitor whose presence on this earth is not fully secure,"[435] and the child's spirit "was neither wholly fixed within the world of the living or within the world of the *kami*"[436] This child shares the innocence of the Romantic conception of the child, positioned near divinity, but in an animist context appears more ambiguous—as much a ghost as a god. Beginning in *Meiji* and continuing into the *Taisho* era "conservative forces [in Japan] launched a revision in education"[437] along the lines of English theorists of Education like John Stuart Mill that entailed a revision in the conception of children. While they remained distinct from adults, children came to be "seen as adults *in potential*…miniature versions of mature individuals.[438]" Empty and shapeless, the adult

[432] Ibid.
[433] May, *The Power of Cute*, 4
[434] Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 7
[435] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 8
[436]Jeremy Lane Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 4
[437] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 75
[438] Ibid.

subjecthood of the innocent *Meiji* child was to be "cultivated and artificially shaped"[439] through education, with an "orientation toward the future, the nation, and the usefulness of knowledge."[440] An Imperial Edict issued by the Minister of Education instructed children to be taught "sincerity and moral conduct, and after that they should turn to the various subjects of learning in accordance with their ability."[441] That "sincerity" is prioritized above even "moral conduct" suggests a continuity between the figure of the innocent child as it appears in both 20th century America and Japan. The positive difference of the *marebito* is supplanted by an evacuated "innocence" that instrumentalizes the cute-*kawaii* child for the purposes of nationalist and capitalist ideologies.

In anglophone literature, these shifting figurations are expressed by what Wyndham Lewis calls "the 'child-cult' of early 20th century modernism," in which "even the most 'intellectualist' literary projects" adopt the forms of 'the hysterical imbecility of the mass market." In the Japanese context, an allegiance between the childish innocent, the human, and the literary is made as a part of the response of modern Japanese novelists to *Meiji* and *Taisho* era education reforms. Founded in 1917 by a student of Natsume Soseki, Suzuki Mikiechi, the goal of the children's magazine *Akai Tori* (Red Bird) was "to provide children with reading materials which would awaken them to beauty,"[442] and to promote "*doshinshugi* (the principle of childish innocence, that

[439] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 86
[440] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 87
[441] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 75
[442] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 106

is the belief that children possess uniquely pure and unspoiled sensibilities)."[443] Featuring writers such as Mori Ogai, Akutagawa Ryunosuke, and Junichiro Tanizaki the styles and themes of *Akai Tori* were fed directly from (and into) the current of canonical Japanese modernism.[444]

There is reason to believe that the "child-cult" of Western modernism is continuous with the Japanese modernists' principle of *doshinshugi*, even as Japan's extended history of valuing childishness enabled a more fully articulated incarnation. In the pages of *Akai Tori*, Giddings argues, "The adult projection of innocence and nostalgia, and the reality of the child's experience—at least in the experience of language—came close together."[445] Ezra Pound's vorticist aesthetics, which model poetic language on the linguistic constructions of children, appears as a parallel project. In the "Vorticist Manifesto," Pound writes, "I once saw a small child go to an electric light switch and say, "Mamma, can I *open* the light?" She was using the age-old language of exploration, the language of art. It was a sort of metaphor, but she was not using it as ornamentation." The 'child cult" of Western modernism, and Japanese modernism's *doshunshugi*, while far from direct analogues, suggest an interrelatedness between the figure of the cute-*kawaii* child, modernization, innocence, and modernist style that cannot be neatly disentangled. In Junichiro Tanizaki's 1928 novel *Manji* (*Quicksand*), for instance, Tanizaki "has a woman narrator use a Joycean interior monologue,"[446] and

[443] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 113
[444] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 106
[445] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 107
[446] Eishiro Ito, "United States of Asia: James Joyce and Japan," 328

specifically appropriates the "signifiers of *shoujo*...to spin a tale of comedy and perversion"[447] that blends high and low, Irish and Japanese modernisms.

Originating in magazines and comic books, Deborah Shammon argues that recognizing the tropes of *shoujo*, and "how girls' culture emerged as a distinct subculture emphasizing purity and innocence" is integral to understanding how Tanizaki's novel navigates the destabilization of gender and family in *Taisho* Japan.[448]Central among these is the homosocial "S relationship," formed between older and younger girl students at newly founded girls' schools. These relationships "encompassed both sexual and platonic connections between girls and did not hinge on a distinction between eroticism and friendship,"[449] and significantly "the insistence in fiction on the purity, innocence, and asexuality of the S relationship" meant that "it was easy for girls to insist that the basis of the S relationship was not sexual." [450] That is, because "the subjects of [S] relationships were schoolgirls, who were assumed to be innocent on the topic of sexual conduct"[451] they were able to more effectively escape its policing, and thus assert "agency in expressing their desires."[452]Appropriating the signifiers of *shoujo*, Tanizaki adapts them to "his own literary obsessions with taboo desires, sadomasochism, and narrative trickery,"[453] and a "woman worshipped as a goddess; pleasure taken too far, ending in

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[447] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizaki's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 4
[448] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizaki's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 5
[449] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizaki's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 6
[450] Kanako Akaeda, "Intimate Relationships Between Women as Romantic Love in Modern Japan." 181–204
[451] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizaki's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 6
[452] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendships*, 44
[453] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizaki's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 7

degradation."[454] Thereby, Shamoon argues, Tanizaki "contains and controls the aspects of the S relationship threatening to the patriarchal order....[and] creates a sexualized, voyeuristic tale of the sho¯jo as perverse and dangerous"[455] for the consumption of male readers.

While compelling, Shamoon's analysis emphasizes one possible reception of *shoujo* among male readers, and in one instance of Tanizaki's appropriation of child-perspective. In the context of his work for *Akai Tori*, we might read more innocent ends into the girl-child language Tanizaki appropriates for *Manji*. Reading Tanizaki's work in the context of the modernist reconfiguration of the child rather than the sexual politics of modern Japan, Jeremy Giddings argues that Tanizaki's predilection for "erotomania and aberrance" should be understood "in terms of an Eternal Child in pursuit of an Eternal Mother," a term and a motif that Giddings identifies in order to adjoin the Western concept of a "mother complex" or an "Oedipus complex," with the Japanese concept of *amae*, "the desire to be enveloped in an indulgent love, a feeling fostered in all infants towards their mothers."[456] Like the adult women in *Manji*, the children of Tanizaki's fiction are ambiguously perverse, inclined to 'active cruelty, or...sadism," coprophilia, coprophagia, and urophilia. [457] Far from sentimentalized innocents, Tanizaki's children "are most often creatures of instinct," driven by "the Freudian force of infantile sexuality and *amae*,""[458] and conditioned by "economic pressures." Thus, their "innocence"

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[454] Ibid.
[455] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizaki's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 5
[456] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 124
[457] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 148
[458] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 188

functions "as a force capable of seriously questioning the exalted freedom of the individual."[459] Furthermore, Giddings argues that Tanizaki shows a continuity between the eroticism of his child characters and "the powerful desires that he shows to exist in adults" that "reveals the adults as childlike."[460] We might term the indeterminacy of innocence, intimacy, sincerity, and identity that presents in both Tanizaki's adult and child characters an unqualified, affective cute-*kawaii* innocence.

A similar affective, anarchic cute-*kawaii* innocence recurs in the work of novelist of the American South, Carson McCullers, whose work might be placed squarely within the cult of the child. Writing during the period of Disney's ascendency in post-war America, McCullers' fiction teems with references to children's culture of the period, including cartoons, newspaper comics, story books, toys, and radio shows. Generally absented from the canon of high literary modernism,[461] and relatively little written about before the 1990s, early studies of McCullers tended to regard her writing as childishly simple.[462] In fact, scholar of Modernism and the American South, Louis B. Rubin dismisses McCullers outright as a writer of children's books, arguing that "the way in which her work can speak to the young reader is not susceptible to very much critical analysis."[463] However, later work suggests McCullers's "children's books" and child characters are, like Tanizaki's, more than merely "innocents." Increasing attention has been paid to McCullers' use of "the grotesque," in its distinctive formulation as a

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[459] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 163
[460] Jeremy Giddings, *Innocence and Instinct*, 188
[461] Margaret A. Johnson, *Carson McCullers and Modernism*, 35
[462] Judith Giblin James, *Wunderkind: the Reputation of Carson McCullers, 1940-1990*,
[463] Louis Decimus Rubin. *A Gallery of Southerners*, 139

character type in Southern Gothic fiction: “outsiders...whose "difference" spectacularly appears on the body.”[464] McCullers’ novels proliferate with characters who are physically deformed, or intellectually disabled, sexually deviant and transgressive. Within the genre of Southern Gothic, the grotesque responds to the social isolation of modernity with mounting existential angst figured in and by “freakish” bodies. Grotesque characters are taken to “represent alienation, loneliness, a lack of human communication, and the failure of love” as a human condition of modernity[465] However, Spivak’s reading of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* locates the novel’s radical potential in its grotesquerie, as the affect structures the unspoken queer relationship between two deaf-mute men, one a “child-idiot-idol” to whom the other “brings the offering of Mickey Mouse and Popeye films.”[466]

Ihab Hassan’s early work on McCullers in turn links the grotesque to a Modernist vexation with innocence. He writes, “The grotesque…in people [is] a kind of inwardness gone sour, a perverse insistence on *subjectivity*. It is innocence deformed and preying on itself...*to perpetuate the victim in the self*.”[467] For Hassan, “innocence” takes the form of a hermetically empty ideological subject, one that refuses engagement with the world beyond the re-inscription of already known (and known to be insufficient) concepts, and becomes grotesque in its compulsive distancing from the world. Following the logic of cute-*kawaii*, however, it becomes possible to read the coincidence of the innocent and the

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[464] Sarah Gleeson-White, “Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers,” 109-110
[465] Ibid.
[466] Spivak, “A Feminist Reading: McCullers Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,” 135
[467] Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, 311

grotesque more ambivalently. The alliance between the innocent and the freakish is akin to the alliance between the innocent and the perverse in Tanizaki's work, in that the ambiguity between innocence and its others begins to appear as the possibility of their interpenetration—the unqualified innocence of the cute-*kawaii*. Kristen Renzi, for instance, evokes Sianne Ngai's cute "undifferentiated blob of dough" in her attention to the way McCullers' grotesque is positioned within the domestic space of the kitchen, and "connects human embodiment to the manipulation of edible dough."[468] Similarly, Rachel Adams reads McCullers' most extreme vision of "remaking the world," as one that can accommodate a "mixture of the *delicious* and the freak," one that is "not organized around a consistent, determining logic of identification, but...revels in quirky opposition to all that is normal... the excremental appreciation of '*chocolate dirt* and rains of lemonade,'" recalling cute-kawaii's association with the edible and the excremental.[469] Attention to McCullers' "excremental appreciations" reveals her thematic interest in the innocence of the grotesque, and the grotesquerie of the innocent reflects less upon a fixed, normative understanding of either term than the undecidability of both.

The undecidability of innocence, erotics, perversion, and sincerity that characterize both McCullers and Tanizaki approximate what I call the affective cute-*kawaii*, and what David Whitley describes as the "active innocence" of playfulness: the rehearsal and evacuation of inherited forms of being that contain the possibility of mutation. Whitley's premiere example of this mode of innocence, *Snow White and the*

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[468] Renzi, "Dough Girls and Biscuit Boys: The Queer Potential of the Countercommunal Grotesque Body within Modernist Literature," 172

[469] Adams, "'A Mixture of Delicious and Freak': The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers," 575

Seven Dwarves (1937), appears just three years before the publication of *The Heart as a Lonely Hunter*. Although the title character condenses several centuries of innocence iconography, dressed in the rags of a Victorian orphan, and then adorned like the Romantic child of nature by woodland creatures,[470] and exemplifies cute-*kawaii* in the mode of an infantilized, feminized, passivity femininity, Whitley finds the film's sensuousness preserves the playful anarchy of a cute-*kawaii* innocence even as the narrative attempts to prepossess its charms for the purposes of normative ideology. By his own account it is not the form or contents to which he responds, "not...the dexterity and inventiveness with which the visual gags have been linked together...nor the charm of the lively musical accompaniment to which the movement is coordinated." Rather, it is "the way dirt is represented,"[471] throughout the film, but particularly within the sequence of "household drudgery" in which Snow White and her woodland creatures clean the dwarves' cottage while "Whistle While You Work" plays.

Although Whitley concedes the scene's probable didactic and ideological functions, he argues "these sequences take too much delight in tactile engagement with dirt and messiness for this didactic impulse to be straightforward."[472] The film appears "fascinated" with dirt in the way "children are often fascinated by dirt," almost erotically transfixed by haptic contact with what contaminates: "we are invited to experience the dirt repeatedly through direct contact with the animals' bodies, as they swish cobwebs

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[470] Notably, Snow White was made *more* passive by Disney when adapted from the Grimm brothers' fairy tale to animation. See Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995).
[471] Whitley, "Learning with Disney: Children's Animation and the Politics of Innocence," 81-82
[472] Ibid.

and accumulated dust up with their tails, lick plates clean with their tongues, and rub clothes along the ridges of upturned turtles' carapaces as simulacra for washboards."[473] Our intimacy with "animals' bodies" in the scene occurs at recognizable contact and contamination zones, "the orifices of the body" that, for our survival, must remain partly open.[474] The tongue, the turtle shell, and the tail that masks proximity to the anus, each index a bodily necessity indeterminately doubled in their appropriation for cleaning. An animated animal licking a plate clean is distinguishable from a real animal eating off a plate only in that the latter prompts disgust. Likewise, to sweep away dirt with a tail threatens "making dirt" with the anus. In the case of the turtle, the enclosure of the shell "opens" onto the enclosure of human clothes by the playful repurposing of what is conceptually a defense mechanism. This doubleness evinces, for Whitley, the "complex symbolic significance" of dirt, its simultaneous associations "with disease and death," as well as with "soil...growth…[and] renewal" as what remains after being composted. Assembling both but assimilating neither the animal and human body through the contagion of dirt, the sequence registers the vulnerability that makes possible contagion, unsettles the adult experience "dirt" and the "dirty," and thus causes the profane to become innocent.

Innocences In Play

The emergence of a more expansive conception of innocence through cute-*kawaii* affect is more fully illustrated through a comparative reading of two scenes of judgment,

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[473] Ibid.
[474] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 83

one from Tanizaki's *Naomi* and one from Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940). Both episodes center on an explicit historical instance of the reification of cute-kawaii affect into conventional commodity form, and likewise demonstrate the potential of cute-*kawaii* innocence-play which is occluded by this reification. The narrative thrust of both novels concerns modernity's shifting valuation of innocence as figured through women and children. The arcs of each loosely trace the material conditions that will give rise, post-WWII, to the codified cute-*kawaii* of Disney and Hello Kitty. However, retracing the historical trajectory of cute-*kawaii* aesthetics, the novels makes explicit *not* a reversal of acuity into cute-*kawaii*, but the repression of acuity in a reification of conventional cute-kawaii form—and likewise the repression of an "acute innocence" that is not categorically determinant, but circumspect and fluid. Centering on the uncertain innocence of two androgynous girl-children, McCullers and Tanizaki's works mirror each other in their attention to the overlapping and layering of contingencies that cause an appearance of innocence, and in doing so the narration itself produces the effect of playful wondering that characterizes a positive, active innocence.

Although McCullers's novel features five distinct POV characters, the slim majority is narrated by the free indirect discourse of a girl, Mick Kelly. With a name condensing anti-Irish sentiment with cartoon characters like Mickey Mouse and Mickey Dugan, Mick begins the novel an androgynous urchin—"at the age when she looked as much like an overgrown boy as a girl,"— and by its end has become a thoroughly feminized shopgirl, wearing stockings and "costume" jewelry, and too exhausted to pursue her dream of learning music. In her article on the text, Spivak scathingly quotes

the blurb from the Bantam paperback edition, which describes the novel as "a searching and sensitive novel of innocence lost."[475] Although Spivak considers the novel "largely caught within the literary tradition of innocence-experience novels," she argues that "the book laments not so much Mick's loss of innocence but her entry into the workforce."[476] Spivak's assertion, however, conceives of innocence along the lines of its ideological construction: as a vacuous signifier of a politically and psychologically vested differentiation. In this mode, "innocence" can be opposed to the material conditions of Mick's maturation and interpellation into capitalism as a fantasy. I contend, instead, that Mick's innocence is not lost. She remains innocent with regards to the ideological institutions that exploit and victimize her as worker, woman, and queer even as she necessarily becomes complicit in their operations. "Innocence" in McCullers's novel appears not as a fantastical projection of purity, but rather a consequence of an assemblage of material and affective contingencies that causes it to appear indiscriminate.

Tanizaki's *Naomi*, like McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, is a novel preoccupied with the appearance of innocence, and its loss. Written following the modernization of Japan during *Meiji*, the novel "stresses that the moment of such cultural innocence, like the sexual innocence it also explores, is an important but also an ephemeral one."[477] Like Mick, the titular Naomi appears as an incarnation of the shifting valuation of innocence in the early 20th century, registering a shift in "the way Japanese

[475] Spivak, "A Feminist Reading: McCullers Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," 131
[476] Spivak, "A Feminist Reading: McCullers Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," 133, 136
[477] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 89

women could "be" women."[478] In fact, Naomi is among the first literary representatives of a *moga* or "modern girl," and "helped to shape the concept and myth surrounding these more liberated women"[479] who threatened patriarchal control of the family. She "bobs her hair, wears the latest Western clothing and cosmetics, and emulates the Hollywood starlet Mary Pickford."[480] Referenced throughout the novel, the specter of Mary Pickford attaches to Naomi not only the glamor of Western modernity, but also the incipient aesthetic of cute-*kawaii*. In 1920s America "celebrities of stage and screen...built careers on their 'childlike' appearance."[481] Mary Pickford "especially,' notes Cross, "played child roles into her thirties," making use of "kittens and birdcages as props...youthful poses and wide-eyed looks, and hiding her woman's body with rags or pinafores."[482] The invocation of a Western cute-*kawaii* icon is further cutified in the Japanese context since "Tanizaki's choice of Mary Pickford to represent Western culture is not without a certain condescension.'[483] Naomi's rendition of a western cuteness is rendered cuter by the cultural limits of her imitation. As with Mick, the question of innocence in the novel is entangled with various material and ideological pressures. Belied by the fantastical projection of western glamor, Naomi's cute-*kawaii* is a function of her position as a woman and worker in *Taisho* Tokyo. When she first meets the adult man who will become her husband, Naomi is working as a *jokyū* (hostess), a position that is 'rapidly replacing geishas in the Taisho period as the preferred comforters of the male ego," and

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[478] Toby Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi,*" 85
[479] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 89
[480] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi,*" 85
[481] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 56
[482] Ibid.
[483] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 92

a ”forerunner of the modern hostess bars”[484] that employ young girls in *kawaii* costumes to the same end. Further insinuating the perverse and the mercantile into the Naomi’s cute-*kawaii*, her family operates a *meishuya* or sake shop, which in *Taisho* also “often offered women as a sideline, such that the term *meishuya* became a euphemism for a whorehouse of the unlicensed variety.”[485]

Comparing Naomi with Mary Pickford introduces to the text not merely signifiers of Western glamor, but the particular form of cute-*kawaii* that is ambiguously cunning or innocent, pure or performative. Although Naomi consciously adopts these signifiers as a form of social capital, it is the novel’s narrator, Joji Kowai, whose name alludes to the phonetic proximity between *kawaii* (cute) and *kowai* (creepy) referenced by Ngai, who asserts, “Naomi resembled the motion-picture actress Mary Pickford.”[486] And it is Joji who *insists* on the resemblance. He informs his future wife, “You look like Mary Pickford,” and later Joji’s “heart cries out, ‘Naomi, Naomi, my Mary Pickford!”[487] Invoking Mary Pickford signals Joji’s intent to “circumvent the normal system of arranged marriages” in Japan in pursuit of a “modern, bourgeois linkage of love and marriage, of work and self-fulfillment,”[488] and in particular a “concept of romantic or spiritual love”[489] introduced from the West in *Meiji*. Called *ren’ai* in Japan, the Western notion of romantic love “was idealized among the middle classes,” and was a prominent theme of early *shojo* culture which saw “the formalization of S relationships in girls’

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[484] Ibid.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 4
[487] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 33
[488] Slade, “Junichiro Tanizaki’s *Naomi*,” 92
[489] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendships*, 10

schools as an expression of romantic love" though it "was considered childish and transitory."[490] Although the relationship between Joji and Naomi inherits gendered power dynamics that the girls of S relationships escape, the novel figures its protagonists as childishly innocent in pursuit of *ren'ai* as the schoolgirls even as it abounds in questions of agency, power, abuse and sincerity mediated by the cute-*kawaii*.

Announcing his designs to marry the adolescent Naomi, the adult Joji claims his relationship with Naomi is "motivated by sympathy" for Naomi's home life, which he describes as "touching and pitiable,"[491] even as he admits he also "wanted to introduce some variety into my humdrum, monotonous daily existence."[492] Joji describes Naomi in nearly the same terms Cross describes the "wondrous" innocent, but the implicit power dynamic of an ideologically inscribed innocence is immediately undercut. Joji makes a series of equivocations, claiming he wants "to make friends with a young girl and observe her development," and to live "a cheerful, playful life in our own house," which "would have a special appeal, quite different from that of setting up a proper household," in that he and Naomi would merely "play house, like children."[493] Joji positions himself rhetorically as Naomi's "friend" and equal, and this both obfuscates hierarchies of age, gender, and economic status and confounds them. In material reality, "Jōji is careful to retain the appearance of Naomi's free will by gaining her consent to each new step in their relationship," but her consent can never really be freely given since Joji "is her only

[490] Akaeda, 2017, 199
[491] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 14
[492] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 6-7
[493] Ibid.

hope for social and economic betterment."[494] At the same time, Naomi represents a significant advancement in social and cultural capital for Joji. While it is true that Naomi is "not quite the femme fatale Joji depicts her as", neither is it true that "Naomi has sexual and social value only to the extent that Jōji assigns it to her."[495]Inasmuch as Naomi's resemblance to Mary Pickford is cultivated by Joji, her western appearance is social capital that provides her some leverage in her dealings with the uncultured, awkward Joji. Joji, in fact, justifies his attraction to Naomi on the basis of her perceived cultural value. He says of the Pickford comparison; "This isn't just my biased view; many others say so ...It must be true."[496]

Like Naomi, Joji oscillates between naive and shrewd. He describes himself as a "country bumpkin" and "an exemplary office worker," who is " frugal, earnest, conventional to a fault, even colorless."[497] His co-workers mockingly refer to him as a "gentleman" because he is "awkward with people" and has "no friends of the opposite sex," a reference to his virginity and naivete. While Naomi needs Joji to provide for her materially, Naomi is necessary to Joji's successful integration into modern Japanese capitalist masculinity. Additionally, because he is a "country bumpkin" Joji is reliant upon modern girl Naomi to navigate life in the Tokyo metropole. The layering of hierarchies of gender, class, geography, and age makes it difficult to discern if either Joji or Naomi is capable of free choice, since Joji's pursuit of Naomi is a consequence of

[494] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 94
[495] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 94
[496] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 4
[497] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 5

social and economic pressures as much as her acquiescence. In the novel this is implied by their parallel characterizations in response to circumstances. Like the cute-*kawaii* thing Joji and Naomi exhibit a vexed passivity. Joji suggests that "if asked today, Naomi would probably say that she went about everything impassively," and although she never affirms his designs Joji notes, 'she never said no when I invited her...she'd reply docilely, and follow me anywhere."[498] This docility is registered in her face, which Joji describes as "pale and dull as a thick pane of colorless, transparent glass."[499] This description links Naomi's relationship with Joji to Joji's relationship to office labor, wherein he too becomes "colorless," as well as impassive since Joji begrudgingly does his "work everyday without the slightest complaint or discontent."[500] Implied is the commutation of Joji's judgment of Naomi as "a child who regarded men without suspicion" whose " feelings are uncomplicated and innocent,"[501] to Joji himself as regards westernization and modernization.

Throughout the novel the economic and cultural forces brought to bear on Joji, Naomi, and their relationship are registered in cute-*kawaii* language and stylization, beginning with the titular name. "Written with three Chinese characters," Naomi's name "excites [Joji's] curiosity" because "written in Roman letters, it could be a Western name," and because Naomi has "such a sophisticated name," she begins "to take on an intelligent, Western look"[502] (in much the same way that *nezumi* came to be seen as

[498] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 8
[499] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 5
[500] Ibid.
[501] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 8
[502] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 4

"rats"). Joji's reading of Naomi's "sophisticated" name, however, rests on a misreading. Though it appears western when transliterated, pronouncing it aloud reveals the incongruity of the Japanese "Now-mi" and the Western "Nay-o-mi." The plot of the novel therefore in some ways centers on the cute-*kawaii* materiality of language, and its capacity to transform itself and other things. Elsewhere Joji observes that Naomi is "fond of inserting English words into her conversation," such that "'Gentleman' became 'gen'lman'" and "'little' became 'li'l'" in cutifying aphaeresis. Joji also notes "Her Japanese had a peculiar accent, too," that consists in "'throwing out one 'don't you know after another."[503] Both are examples of "*onna kotoba*, notably gender-marked language." and in particular the language of *shojo* which employed numerous phrases "derived from English words."[504][505] However, in Japanese "Repeated sentence endings with -*ka* mark Naomi's speech as a "masculine" way of speaking," suggesting a "reversed power relationship between Naomi and Jōji."[506] Taken together these linguistic markers evince the profligacy of the cute-*kawaii*, its apprehension of something's non-identity, manifest as an undecidability between the poles of masculine and feminine, foreign and domestic, and actor and acted upon.

The transformative potential of the cute-*kawaii*, as well as its relationship to sincerity, innocence, and language, is demonstrated most forcefully in the novel's depiction of "play." In the same way that "playing house" for the couple becomes

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[503] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 65
[504] Deborah Shamoon, "The Girl in the Whirlpool: Girl's Culture in Tanizai's *Manji* (*Quicksand*)," 5
[505] Kim, "Translating Gendered Voices," 149
[506] Kim, "Translating Gendered Voices," 157

indistinguishable from "being" a household, everything "played" at in the novel risks becoming real. Joji attempts to instill in Naomi the truism that "'play is play, study is study,'" but soon discovers that "No matter what I said, 'Play' and 'Study' had a way of merging."[507] That is to say, in the novel the rational conceptualization of things as expressed in language is revealed as both a function of, and therefore vulnerable to, being played. Joji describes Naomi as "a rare, precious doll and an ornament," but wonders if "'making Naomi a fine woman' [is] compatible with 'cherishing her like a doll?'"[508] However, the novel suggests that it is through treating Naomi as his toy doll that Joji becomes feminized, even as the metaphor asserts his dominance. Joji is "entranced by Naomi's capacity for physical transformation," and like a child with a barbie doll he seeks "ever more exotic costumes"[509] in which to pose Naomi. Metaphorized as a doll, Naomi is reduced to an object for Joji to use. However, the metaphor also entails a transformation in Joji. As in the case of the cute-*kawaii* commodity and its cute-*kawaii* owner, Joji "Conflates desire with identification, or 'wanting to have' with 'wanting to be like."[510] If Naomi becomes a "doll," for Joji to play with then Joji is simultaneously infantilized and feminized as the doll's owner. When Joji says "neither [Naomi nor I] was satisfied with the usual women's things," he implicitly positions himself as a female consumer subject, sharing in Naomi's gendered attraction to and appreciation for luxury goods. The innocent mispronunciation of "Naomi" that inspires Joji's attraction is

[507]Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 39-41
[508] Ibid.
[509] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 92
[510] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 67

complemented by the transformative mispronunciation that decisively emasculates him. Appearing to be Naomi's "faithful slave," Joji is derided not only by her, but "also by her foreign boyfriends, who....in parallel to the transformative nature of her "modern," "Western" name that impressed him so much when they met"[511] dub Joji "George."

The most explicit instance of slippage between playing and being concerns a "deception" regarding intelligence that is undecidably sincere. Beating him at a board game, Naomi declares herself "smarter than" Joji. In a coy aside to his reader, Joji claims to "play the fool and pretend to be taken in...letting her be pleased with herself," while he "rejoices in being deceived."[512] He insists he merely "plays along" with Naomi's "pretensions to cleverness" as if he were "trying to make a small child happy.[513]" It is, however, Joji's pretensions that are exposed. Although, "he laughs to himself that he's deceiving her,"Joji finds that "losing got to be a habit," until he cannot "beat [Naomi] no matter how hard" he tries.[514] As reality fits itself to his "deception," Joji's conceptualization shifts, and he becomes unable to identify with himself as a rational agent. He writes "at first I was humoring Naomi, or at least I thought I was."[515] He can no longer distinguish intentions from intensities, agencies from trajectories. Naomi's rationalization refers us to the irrational and affective. She argues that "victory and defeat aren't determined solely by intellect. Rather, "such a thing as spirit or, put another way, animal electricity,"[516] contributes to the outcome. In doing so retroactively re-

[511] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 93
[512] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 51
[513] Ibid.
[514] Ibid.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 52

conceptualizes the "smartness" she attributes herself. While Joji might understand the written rules of the game, Naomi understands how to play at playing the game in order to undermine Joji's self-assurance. Joji as much as concedes the point earlier, writing that although Naomi "had no talent for grammar, she was very sharp when it came to reading my face."[517] Suffering the uncanny fate of so many doll-lovers described by Barbara Johnson, Joji discovers "his object was suddenly a subject, able to make its maker into an object,"[518] and the assumed hierarchy between the rational adult man and the irrational girl-child is destabilized through a cute-*kawaii*'s ambiguously innocent cunning.

In chapters 10 and 11 of the novel the dynamics of cute-*kawaii* innocence are elaborated through the staging of three cute-*kawaii* femininities and Joji's cute-*kawaii* judgment of them. As Joji litanies his aesthetic criteria for modern femininity, the reader is invited to make a comparison between Joji and the women he judges. Although Jojo aspires to convince the reader of his connoisseurship, the narration consistently undercuts his attempts to systematize, rationalize, or objectify. As with Naomi, Joji figures Kirako, ""a Japanese actress at the Imperial theater, who wore dazzling clothes," and Kikuko, "a surprisingly good-natured woman" who cannot "seem to realize she was being ridiculed,"[519] as cute-*kawaii* dolls. Of Kirako, the actress, Joji remarks, "How thin, almost transparent was that little nose on her firm, round face! Not even a baby—only a doll made by the greatest master—could have such a delicate nose!"[520] He attributes to her

[517] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 49
[518] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 175
[519] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 92
[520] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 93

mien a number of cute-*kawaii*'s aesthetic qualities, including smallness, blankness, roundness, and tactility, and metaphorizes her as the cutified image of a cutified thing. Recalling the "highly cultivated" children of *Meiji* and *Taisho*, and the stylized sincerity of cute-*kawaii* commodities, Kirako appears "gracefully, coquettishly...with a self-composed smile," and is "refined in every way," as if she were "a precious object that's been scrupulously polished with the highest art."[521] In contrast, Kikuko looks "like a monster,"[522] and Joji describes her as "a Western doll with the head of a Kyoto doll" whose "clothes and...features didn't go together." Kikuko is particularly pitiable, Joji notes with passing sympathy, because being "at pains to harmonize" her person and her costume "with all sorts of devices" Kikuko manages "to spoil her good looks." She wears "green makeup around her eyes," which Joji says are "larger" than ordinary for a Japanese girl, and a "pink dress" with "a ribbon wrapped around her head and over her forehead" in order to conceal her real eyebrows, having drawn an additional pair beneath.[523]

The powerful positive and negative affects of Joji's critiques belie the unstable terms of his rationalizations. Kikuko is both too artificial, and too sincere for Joji's tastes, while Kirako curiously appears sincere to Joji because of her artificiality. In purely formal terms, however, the differences between them are negligible. Kikuko shares with Kirako "the oval outline of her face, with its long, thin nose," but what appears in the latter as the "highest art" of "the greatest master" becomes in the former "a monkey's

[521] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 91-92
[522] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 84
[523] Ibid.

pitiful effort."[524] While it might appear that Joji bases his judgment on the women's relative skill at makeup application, his impassioned responses rapidly shift registers between the aesthetic, the psychological, and sociological. Consequently, the agency implied by the metaphors of "high art" and "monkey's effort" is confused through a network of attempted rationalizations that undercuts the basis of the judgment. Moreover, Joji's staging of himself as rational critic through his judgment is undone as the ideological insinuations of the metaphors make clear the constructedness of his judgment's rationality. Principally, his judgment is determined by what Bourdieu describes as "distinction"—the cultural capital accrued by an object of interest within a field of meaning. While Naomi's cultural capital derives from her resemblance to the American "Mary Pickford, a *Yankee girl*," Kirako represents "a subtle beauty from Italy or France, graceful and vaguely flirtatious,"[525] and in contrast, Kikuko's face "has…'pure Japan' written all over it" since it "was in the pure Japanese style of the *ukiyoe* prints."[526] The three women are thus conceptualized and ranked by Joji according to their perceived proximity to the "modern," "western" world with Kirako as Europe, Naomi as America, and Kikuko as Japan.

Almost immediately the narrative undercuts these conceptualizations, as instability arises from both internal inconsistency and ancillary ideological and psychological pressures. Discussing Kikuko's bizarre presentation, Naomi argues Kikuko

[524] Ibid.
[525] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 92
[526] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 84

is "stupid, that's all."[527] To the reader, Joji instead opines Kikuko "was probably distressed by her Japanese face and had worked overtime to look like a Westerner.'"[528] That this is an act of projection is suggested by the phrase "worked overtime,"[529] which figures Kikuko as Joji's fellow office worker, and confirmed by Joji and the text's anxious negotiation of the racial dimensions of westernized modernity. One reason Kikuko's performance fails is because she applies white rice powder too heavily to her dark skin, which highlights both the exclusion of non-whiteness from western modernity, and the ontological risks of being othered. Despite being "Pure Japan" the text associates Kikuko with blackness, and characters describe her using the tropes of anti-blackness: Naomi calls her "a monkey," and attends to the thickness of her lips.[530] Joji, who describes himself as "dark as a savage,"[531] explains his own "awkwardness" in attempting to explain Kikuko, projecting onto Kikuko his own fear of being othered by another's gaze.

Apart from explaining his disdain for Kikuko, Joji's anxiety about being Otherized also fuels attempts to distinguish his attraction to Kirako from his attraction to Naomi, and both from "ordinary sexual desire" since any of these might threaten his self-conception as a western-style autonomous, rational, individual. The logical contradictions arising from these distinctions though, gives the lie to Joji's self-conception, and in the translation they additionally play out in a pun. Despite earlier appealing to his own

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[527] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 84
[528] Ibid.
[529] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 83
[530] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 84
[531] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 94

authority in order to criticize Kikuko, telling the reader he "pays close attention to women's faces," in order to assert that he'd "never seen such an ill-sorted face" as hers, as he praises Kirako's beauty, he assures the reader that "Strictly speaking...I had no eyes for any woman other than Naomi."[532] Disavowing his physical eyes, Freud's figurative phallus, and warding off the sexualization and animalization of the non-Western Other, Joji asserts the moral innocence of the rational Western self-identifying "I." Intuiting a contradiction, however, between an embodied "I" and disembodied eyes, Joji attempts to resolve it by introducing another. When Joji "sees a beautiful woman," he says his eyes do not "look," they "sense her beauty." To introduce a difference to this distinction, he clarifies that with a woman other than Naomi he "only wanted to look at her...without touching her."[533] However, in the case of Kirako this is no excuse. His fingers sense, and Joji relays that "her whole body was soft, like cotton, and her hands were as smooth as new leaves."[534] While Kirako is valued for appearing more European than either Kikuko or Naomi, it is her tangibility that decisively disqualifies her from Joji's conception of a "European." A true European, such as his matronly Russian dance teacher, Joji considers too "different...too sublime, too elusive, too dreamlike"[535] to be sincerely attracted to. Without irony or awareness, Joji presents Kirako to the reader as evidence of his sexual innocence and disinterested connoisseurship, and at the same time displays the fetishistic investments undergirding his judgment.

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[532] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 84, 94
[533] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 94
[534] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 99
[535] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 94

Moreover, the failure of Joji's judgment is not personal, as his self-conception would have it, but structural. In particular, it demonstrates insufficiencies of western conceptions of an animalized body, and enlightenment conceptions of a mechanized body as they relate to conceptions of gender, power, and agency. At the same time he lauds Kirako's face as the "highest art," Joji dismisses Kikuko because "almost every part of her face was contrived."[536] Again, Joji's critiques, though differently affected, are fundamentally identical since any "art" entails "contrivance." What distinguishes Kirako is that she contrives to appear to Joji as the object of his contrivance, appearing as the doll he desires to use, while the excessive presence of Kikuko's body contradicts any pretension to an ideal doll-body of western femininity, and even Naomi "exceeds the bounds of mere liveliness" to become "a wild animal." Kirako is assumed by Joji to lack the bodily autonomy he attributes to Naomi and Kikuko. However, Joji's efforts to rationally discern an objective basis for his differently affected responses again reveals his inability to accurately construct and deploy meaningful concepts. Kirako appears as a "precious object" to Joji through a combination of affect, performance, and circumstance that enables her to manipulate his conceptualization of her. The characters shifting positions with regards to power and powerlessness, knowing and not knowing, is registered in the ontological oscillations of Joji's metaphors, which also reflect the novel's broader concern with judging innocence and sincerity.

Dancing with Kirako, Joji says, is awkward but "she adapts herself to him the way an intelligent horse does to its rider." Consequently, Joji glides "around as smoothly

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[536] Ibid,

and effortlessly as if he were riding a merry-go-round." Here it is important not only that the metaphors together comprise both the animal and child poles of cute-*kawaii* innocence, but that in both the former and the latter the metaphor cutifies Joji at the same time it cutifies Kirako. Though it is tempting to read the metaphors hierarchically with Joji positioned as the rider of both horse and object in both cases Joji is likewise diminished, and power is distributed ambiguously or undecidably. Figured as the child-consumer of a fairground mechanical commodity, Joji becomes a cog-victim within a capitalist scheme; figured as the particularly stupid rider of an "intelligent" horse recalls how easily a horse can kill an uncooperative rider. Earlier in the novel, Joji recounts "playing horse" with Naomi: a game in which he "crawls around the room with her on his back," a towel in his mouth "for reins," while Naomi exclaims "'Giddap, giddap!'"[537] Describing Kirako as "a horse" therefore implicitly equates her with Joji, and possibly elevates her above her fellow equine. The fact that Joji transitions from animal to object as he proceeds in his assessment suggests again he intuits a contradiction in his conceptualization that he attempts to resolve through the introduction of another. Transforming Kirako from agent to object of conveyance transforms Joji from equestrian to child playing at one. In his attempt to corral his experience into accord with his conceptualization of masculine agency and feminine passivity, Joji cedes agency almost entirely.

Layered into this concession is the increasing artificiality of the metaphorical terms. As Kirako shifts from a horse to its representation, Joji becomes the cultivated

[537] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 21

Meiji child. Ironically, this metaphorization, most at odds with Joji's self-conception, most accurately describes his circumstances. Kirako manufactures, under duress, Joji's experience of "lightness" through her performative utterance: "Oh, my, you're very good. You're so easy to dance with." Though the reader and Joji can easily infer the lie, neither the text nor Kirako makes it explicit, and it is not clear Joji is aware. That the statement is cute-*kawaii* derives from its simultaneous naivete and cunning. The lie is obvious, but its very obviousness makes it indisputable since it retains the potential to be sincere—really *felt* if not really *real*. As in Joji and Naomi's game, the upshot of this is not that deception distorts, or that Kirako and Naomi misrepresent reality and Joji, but that a collective fantasy is *affected* which meaningfully impacts the perceived reality of its participants. While from a psychological perspective it is true that "the visible relationship of master and slave is only a façade," and "Tanizaki's male masochists call attention to this dynamic by actually creating their temptresses before surrendering to them,"[538] to regard Joji only as a 'masochist,' or Naomi only as a 'temptress,' ignores the interrelated complex of agencies and intensities that cause that psychology to appear as such. Most significantly, the novel "testifies to the social penetration of the idea of modernity" that has seduced both "Jōji, the country boy, and Naomi from the pleasure quarter" such that they "share a basic aspiration for the West."[539] Cute-*kawaii* affect appears in this context as the becoming innocent of becoming interpellated, as Joji and the reader's intuitive apprehension with regards to the concepts and structures Joji employs to make sense of

[538] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 93
[539] Slade, "Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi*," 92

his circumstance.

By happy coincidence, the parallel incident in McCullers's novel similarly concerns the transformations of both person into doll, and person into "George." By the close of the episode two similarly acute-cute-*kawaii* children, George "Bubber" Kelly and Baby Wilson will have been neatly slotted into distinct demographic aesthetic categories. Bubber, masculine agent, comes to be seen as "acute" and dangerous, while Baby, feminine object, is reduced to the exaggerated passivity and implicit instrumentality of commodity cuteness. As in Tanizaki's novel, the judgments rendered by the characters in the text are problematized by the expanded sense of innocence we are invited to feel, reflected in the numerous ontological and epistemological shifts encountered en route to that judgment. Bubber Kelly, younger brother of protagonist Mick, is described by his sister thus: "he looks sick, and likes pretty things, but he's got guts underneath that," and is aligned with conventional cute-kawaii in his simultaneous vulnerability and resilience. However, Bubber is additionally described as possessing an uncanny intelligence, since, according to Mick, "it was like [he] had been born knowing how to read...he loved to read stories by himself—and he never asked anybody else to read to him," and this suggests the shrewdness of the acute.[540] Meanwhile, The narration, as aggressively as her costume, her accessories, and her name, aligns Baby with conventional cute-kawaii aesthetics. While the Kelleys are poor, Baby appears relatively well-off. She looks like "a fairy or something in the picture show," decorated with "a little pink-gauze skirt that stuck out short and stiff, a pink body waist, pink dancing shoes,

[540] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter,* 164

and even a little pink pocketbook."[541] When she "prisses across the street in a cute way," ignoring the Kelleys, she's met with the exclamation, "Ain't Baby cute," and Bubber covets her "cute little pink pocketbook."[542]

After he shoots her, Bubber bemoans "I—I didn't mean Baby to fall. She was just so little and cute—seemed to me like I just had to take a pop at her.'"[543] Nonetheless, in the narrative of their violent encounter *Bubber* appears as 'cute' as Baby, and in the aftermath his cuteness *intensifies*. As our scene begins, Bubber rests a rifle on his shoulder, and requests Mick bring him back a story from the library: "'Pick out some stories with something to eat in them," preferably "a story with something like a barbecue sandwich in it." If Mick can't find a story with a barbecue sandwich he'd like a "cowboy story." He only asks that she doesn't bring him a fairytale because Bubber is "getting kinda tired of candy."[544] Amidst this discussion of narrative gusto, Baby Wilson enters the scene in pursuit of candy from her "Unca" Biff's shop, and "suddenly Mick stopped and stared," and "the kids stared too" because Baby is "so small and clean that it almost hurts to watch her."[545] Though Baby seems to have universal appeal it is Bubber who makes the initial pronouncement of cuteness, and only Bubber who "would watch [Baby] as she came out to dance" in her "pink soiree costume" through the whole summer without getting bored.[546] It is Bubber's acute and impotent queer desire to possess the feminized signifiers of cute-kawaii that makes him, within the novel's narration, cute.

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[541] Ibid.
[542] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 165
[543] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 169
[544] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter,* 164
[545] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 164–165
[546] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 165

Because to enjoy the pleasures of being aesthetically cute would make him a "sissy," Bubber is sure not to acquire the "costume" he wants for Christmas, "A real pretty one made out of all the different colors. Like a butterfly."

Like Joji, Bubber exhibits the cute-*kawaii's* ambiguous doubling of "wanting to have" with "wanting to be," and the repeated frustration of Bubber's attempts to approach the recognizable signifiers of cute-*kawaii* elicit the most intense expression of the affect. Rifle still mounted on his shoulder, Bubber calls out "Lemme see your little pink pocketbook and touch your pink costume,"[547] but Baby appears not to hear his request: she "passes by without letting Bubber play with her...only ducks her head and grins a little."[548] A child, Bubber then expresses his frustrated desires in a manner perhaps modeled after his cowboy stories, "He made a loud *pow* sound and pretended like he had shot," before calling to Baby again "in a soft, sad, voice like he was calling a little kitty. 'Please, Baby—come here, Baby—'"[549] In the build-up to the gunshot both Baby and Bubber appear cuter. However, with reference to a common vehicle for cute-kawaii—the little kitty—the implicit hierarchy of cute-kawaii intensity is reversed. Although implicitly it is Baby who is like the kitten, the way the simile functions within the narration, set off from Baby by an M dash and a period, attaches all the kitten's cuteness to Bubber. Furthermore, although the simile refers to the kitten, the resemblance is not between the kitten and anything within the scene. It is instead between the manner in which Bubber might call a cat and in the manner in which he calls Baby. While the cat

[547] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 166-167
[548] Ibid.
[549] Ibid.

signifies cuteness, the manner of its signification evacuates cuteness from its essence. Rather than discretely being cute, by virtue of its form, the cat invoked in "like he was calling a little kitty" calls attention to cute-kawaii as a *style*, as a thing that appears as both the *way* a cat is and the *way* one calls it. The circuit of cute-kawaii in the scene is not delimited not to the formal qualities of actors and agents, but the appeal and response that emerge from the way things are presently assembled. Although it is Baby who signifies cute, and is literally associated with cute's signification by language, Bubber affects it.

It is immediately after this that he shoots her. The narration presents it as a lacuna, only registering that "Baby crumpled down to the sidewalk." What resides in that lacuna is an indeterminacy of indeterminacies—a "choice of complicities."[550] In the same way that Joji's rationalizations disclose a variety of ideological and psychological pressures which influence his judgment, Bubber's crime exposes the "night of non-knowledge" the characters inhabit with regards to their own understanding. In a remarkably compact paragraph, McCullers indicates that "Bubber was the only one that didn't realize," Baby had been shot, he had shot her: "'Get up, Baby,' he hollered. 'I ain't mad with you.'"[551] Bubber's shrewdness reverses into naivete. Well read enough that he might be said to have taste, Bubber initially seems unable to comprehend what happened. His motivation is implied by a disavowal, and a misrecognition. Bubber projects anger onto Baby's crumpled body. He reads her crumpling as an indictment—he sees her as angry at *him*,

[550] Spivak, "Responsibility," 25
[551] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 167

reads her body's reaction as a *sign* of *something*. In the precipitation and the aftermath of his violent action, Bubber becomes the most intensely cute thing in the scene, stuttering appeals to his unintended victim.

The confrontation between these acutely cute children renders both innocent, in the context of a happening with as-of-yet no fixed meaning (even as the gun and the dress open onto an ideological horizon of gender as meaning). They, and everything, are at play. The thoroughly un-cute gun becomes an aspect of Bubber's composite affective cuteness. In his hands it comes to signal his resilience to normative gender. While Bubber seems to model the masculinity of American cowboys—what Barbara Johnson describes as "The rugged masculinity of John Wayne's 'Aw shucks' cowboy cuteness"[552] —he also consciously desires the signifiers of Baby's femininity. It is unclear to what extent Bubber ultimately aligns with the sexual politics he apes, in which his dominance of Baby pushes him into adult American masculinity, and to what extent he fails to align or is incapable of aligning due to his desire to become *like* Baby. The gun embodies this indeterminacy as a phallus that takes aim at the wrong object. While Bubber's target is interpreted by the characters in the novel as Baby, what is suggested in the text quoted above is that the target is not Baby herself but her glut of cute commodities. The gun and the dress appear to be in autonomous opposition to each other, and to influence Bubber and Baby's actions. The objects are un-innocent as they actively shape the scene, both in what they facilitate and in the ideological pressures they index. Within the lacuna of Bubber's reaction-response there is the dissolution of multiply implicated oppositions

[552] Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 103

between child innocence/adult sexuality, and aggressive masculinity/passive femininity that are one vector of the grotesque. Not only do these children exhibit desire, but their desire mocks the form of normative adult heterosexuality. Prosthetically incorporated into the child performance of gender, these objects substitute for adult sexual organs. Through the conscious or unconscious imitation of adult sexual politics with their object-organs, we see Bubber and Baby are not innocent in the ideological sense because they are already ideologically contaminated.

The gun Bubber wields, flatly phallic, belonged to his friend's father, and passed from father to son upon his father's death. A cartoonishly massive phallus, the gun is also the means by which the grotesque enters the scene in the mode of child eroticism. Mikhail Bakhtin argues the "essential" form of the grotesque "belongs to those parts of the…body in which it outgrows itself…in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus…the mouth…the anus."[553] Bubber's gun exceeds him, and substitutes itself for his incompletely masculine body. Notably not a commodity but an inheritance, a gift, the gun embodies and *obliges* a form of masculinity as violent domination. Before his remark about Baby's purse he rests "the end of the rifle on the ground" because "the big gun was too heavy for him," and after he's called "sissy" for wanting his colorful "costume," Bubber hauls "the big rifle up to his shoulder...and aims at a house across the street."[554] Bubber's cuteness is enhanced by the heaviness of the gun because it highlights his small stature, but also his marginal position as evinced by his

[553] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317
[554] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 165, 166

inability to wield the phallic symbol properly, or to take aim at a definite object. Bubber appears to register the force of normativity, but cannot articulate a relationship between abstract social force and personal vulnerability. Not only can he not successfully perform masculinity, he cannot even successfully rebuke it because its influence is so diffuse. The gun compensates his impotence, enables him to play at masculinity, to perform it in a seemingly inconsequential way. His final appeal to Baby to break her silence is prefaced by a dumb-play at masculinity, in which he mocks firing the gun, replete with comic book onomonpoeia, before firing for real.

Significantly, my claim is not that Baby is not cute, or not *authentically* cute, or that, a seeming avatar of commodity cuteness, she deserved to be shot. Like Bubber, the hyper-femininity of Baby's aggressively pink commodities suggests the formation of a second, grotesque body, pink being "the pan-racial color of erotic orifices: the mouth and its tongue, the vagina, the anus,"[555] and although Baby more closely resembles cute-kawaii form as it has been reified by 20th century consumerism, in the novel even those aesthetic signifiers have underlying dimensions of acuity that serve to complicate the question of Baby's innocence. Like Bubber, Baby's cuteness is intensified by their encounter, however her cute-*kawaii* aesthetic is already aligned with the tastes of public consumption. Whereas Bubber loses access to conventionally legible cuteness, the narrative of Baby's victimization relies on and reaffirms the assumption that she lacks acuity, and is "cute" only in the sense of exaggerated helplessness and passivity. Her innocence is assumed, according to a patronizing presumption of femininity's innocence.

[555] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 34

However, Baby is from the moment she appears more "acute" than Bubber. Her appearance might be glossed as sharp—she "hurts" to look at because she is so "little" and "clean"—and she exhibits more cunning than he. Mick infers Baby had "made up her mind" not to speak to the Kelleys because as Baby promenades she will not "turn her face toward them." She pauses to cartwheel "with her head held to one side."[556] Baby's insistent de-facing of herself suggests, even if she is conventionally cute, she contains some degree of the uncanny, and vaguely threatening acuity Simon May describes as desiring "to be known and recognized…and then to hide." "Intensely aware of relations of power," Baby's speechlessness does not derive from naivete or stupefaction, it is, rather, knowingly staged so that the cuteness and chicness of her commodities might be better exhibited.[557]

This staging is ambivalent. On the one hand, Baby's performance exercises ideological power, and her cute commodities inscribe on her body her position of relative class superiority to her onlookers. On the other, Baby's defacement depersonalizes her in order to "give face" to the commodities. While the novel gives no indication that Baby *knows* her performance provokes Bubber's desire to be cutely feminine at the same time that it reinscribes its unattainability for him, it does suggest she herself aims to escape her commodification by cuteness. Thus while Bubber's stuttering speech more nearly resembles the cute speech of the judging subject, modified to approximate cuteness, it is the less mediated, more 'authentically' naive mode of cute speech in the scene. 'Til he

[556] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 167
[557] May, *The Power of Cute*, 42

shoots; and she's shot. Baby's staged silence then becomes actual silence, and her cuteness is accordingly intensified. Her staged defacement likewise succeeds to a more literal form as Mick notes, "She was shot in the head and her face was turned down to the ground," and, lying unconscious, Baby becomes "like a pretty little doll" where before she had only been decorated like one.[558] Lastly, as Bubber's agency is exaggerated, and he becomes more man than child, Baby's is diminished until she is no more than an object, in both the grammatical sense of the victim of a crime, always acted upon by the criminal subject, and the sense of an ideological subject that is the object of ideological suasions. While Baby's provocations are arguably "innocent" of being a personal rebuke of Bubber, her innocence as such is like his indeterminate because her intention nonetheless appears to be to perform her relative power. It is the indeterminacy of innocence that is repressed in her transition to aesthetic cuteness.

. It is the unknowing of this myth that appears to cause the overwhelming "dead feeling" in the Kelley Boarding House: it is certain that "Baby was going to get well all right, so this worry was not about her. And nobody seemed to be anxious about Bubber. It was something else."[559] In response to the shooting, Bubber's father laments, "'I never have whipped any of my kids yet...I never believed in it. But I'm going to lay it onto that kid as soon as I get my hands on him."[560] That he has never before "whipped" his children underlines his innocence for the reader even as he vows to "lay into" Bubber. To decide that Bubber must be disciplined or domesticated, and how, is to acknowledge an

[558] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 167, 168
[559] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 170
[560] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 168

insufficiency of concepts that puts knowledge back into play. Like Joji, Mr. Kelly justifies, rationalizes, "It was deliberate...It's not like the kid was *just* fooling with the gun and it went off by accident. Everybody who *saw* it said he took deliberate aim.'"[561] Mr. Kelley attempts to conceive of Bubber as an adult, and so the possibility that "just fooling" might entail "fooling" at aiming, with the fantasy to shoot; or that a child might not be able to distinguish between the fantasy of shooting and actually shooting; or that the 'fooling' of aiming and shooting might entail enacting the forms of aiming and shooting; or that Bubber acted with deliberate malice; or that innocent Baby might have instigated him—all conceivably occur to him, and all conceivably exceed his ready-made concepts in ways that resist thought and prompt the contamination of a response. In the novel, however, cute-*kawaii* is in transit, and the demythologization of innocence yields innocence elsewhere.

When Baby's mother, Mrs. Wilson arrives at the boarding house, she expresses her distress in a sternly conducted, legal and economic negotiation. She establishes first of all she has legal grounds to sue because she insists that Bubber, against Mick's protestations that his "finger slipped," shot "Baby in the head on purpose" and is thus legally liable.[562] Implicit in this assignation of legal responsibility is the disavowal of Baby's agency since if Baby intentionally provoked Bubber those grounds become muddied. Threatening a lawsuit against the Kelleys, Mrs. Wilson claims she only wants to be "fair," and does not need them to "pay for all the suffering and crying Baby went

[561] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 170-174
[562] Ibid.

through," or even "the damage this will do to her career and the plans we had made," but only "the actual price of what it will cost...in money."[563] She itemizes: Baby's private room at the hospital, the private nurse that comes with it, the price of the operation, "the price of her costume," as well as the price of a "permanent wave."[564] In her rights to receive restitution, a knowing reader will be able to identify Mrs. Wilson's own cute-*kawaii* acuity at work. Despite performing concern for fairness, Mrs. Wilson attempts to defraud the Kelleys the price of a perm. Thirty pages earlier, Mrs. Wilson, who works as a cosmetologist, debates taking Baby to Atlanta for a permanent wave because the finger waves she gives Baby herself "come out so quick."[565] This deception cannot be read as undermining her pretension to fairness, however, since it is girded by Mrs. Wilson's own complicated cutification and commodification of Baby. Her emotional and economic investments in her daughter are undecidably tangled, and Baby's conventional cuteness indexes both Baby's conventionally cute form, and the exploitation of cute form by normative ideologies of class, gender, and late capitalist production that affects cuteness in its objects even when they, as subjects, behave reprehensibly.

Baby's golden hair, commodified index of her idealized, infantilized, white femininity, is the site of her cutification, and also her mother's, since it is with regard to Baby's hair that Mrs. Wilson becomes shrewd. She is warned by her brother-in-law that Baby is too young for a perm, and "liable to scare her," but "Mashing the curls over Baby's ears," Mrs. Wilson argues that "...Baby wants one. Young as Baby is, she already

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[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid.
[565] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 125

has as much ambition as I got." When they go to the movies together, and they "see those kids in all the good roles," Mrs. Wilson *knows* that Baby "feels the same way,"[566] her mother does, in much the same way that Joji can "tell how much Naomi likes the movies," by observing "her face as she watches in silence, her intelligent eyes wide open like those of an alert dog listening to a distant sound."[567] Baby's staging of herself such that she appears to Mick and Bubber as "a movie star" is both staged by Baby in the moment of the scene, and predetermined by her mother's staging of her. To market Baby to potential talent agents, her mother has enrolled her in dance and expression lessons, and next year will start her at piano. She feels as if she has to "push Baby all she can" because "the sooner Baby gets started on her career the better it'll be for the both of us."[568]This crude expression of economic investment is met with an astonished, "Motherogod!" But it is not possible to reduce Mrs. Wilson's co-option of her daughter's cuteness for material gain to purely selfish motives. From Mrs. Wilson's perspective, the cutification of Baby is also the acute-ification of Baby, a way of teaching her to succeed in an economic and patriarchal system that demands the commodification of the subject's, and especially the female subject's, body. As she says, "You don't have to bother about Baby. I tell her everything. She knows about the whole mess from A to Z."[569]

The "whole mess" refers to Mrs. Wilson's abusive relationship with Baby's

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[566] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 125
[567] Tanizaki, *Naomi*, 9
[568] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 126
[569] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 128

father, but her hyperbolic language suggests the retort's more extensive scope. When asked if her husband "comes back you'll let him stay here and sponge on you just as long as he pleases?" She responds, "Yeah. I guess I would."[570] The series of conditionals in the exchange introduce a complicated layering of agency, intensity, and ideological pressure. Although she appears to support herself and Baby financially, and suffers abuse by her husband, "If" her husband chooses to come back, Mrs. Wilson will "let" him do so. The remark simultaneously calls attention to the ideological pressures constraining Mrs. Wilson's agency, and to the disavowals of agency Mrs. Wilson must make in order to survive under ideological constraint. The question of Baby's innocence thus redounds to her mother. To succeed as a woman under capitalism, for Mrs. Wilson, means being able to exchange the successful performance of womanhood, and necessary to the successful performance of womanhood under patriarchy is the assumption of passivity. Her staging of her daughter's passivity is thus a re-staging of her own internalized sense of gendered passivity. Her explanation of her own circumstances is framed in the same way that she frames Baby as the legal victim of Bubber's crime: Mrs. Wilson is the grammatical object on which her estranged husband will "sponge"—if she lets him. The tradeoff for being able to leverage the performance of femininity to get a part in a picture show is abuse: Mrs. Wilson by her estranged husband, Baby by her mother.

Literalizing the imposition of cuteness and innocence onto children, Baby's organic child cuteness is revealed to be as artificial as a doll. Mrs. Wilson "pinches the kid's little cheeks to put more color in them." Although Mrs. Wilson asserts repeatedly

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[570] Ibid.

that she thinks only of "fixing three meals here at home and Baby's career," her concern does not extend to ensuring Baby has time to eat those meals, since it is implied Baby is so small she is underweight.. When they return from the movies, Mrs. Wilson says, "she can't even get Baby to eat her supper,"[571] which she takes as a sign of their mutual, enthusiastic ambition. What is suggested here is Mrs. Wilson's concept of Baby interferes with responding to Baby's needs, a possibility supported by the glimpses we are given into Baby's perspective. While her mother and uncle debate what's best for her, Baby performs for them in the same way she performs for the neighborhood children, replete with defacement. Her uncle notes, "There was a certain way Baby always held her head when people looked at her...it was turned that way now."[572] Baby implores, "Unca Biff! Watch me do a split," but as she poses "with her arms held at a fancy angle," she looks "sideways at the wall with a sad expression."[573] Like the cute-kawaii object that appears unable, without the subject-judge, to articulate itself, take action, or do anything *but* appeal, Baby appears able to take initiative only to accomplish her own objectification. She seems to believe her role, as a cute-girl-child-object, is to perform herself for others. However much Bubber might enjoy wearing Baby's "costume" himself, that Mrs. Wilson and Baby are always already alienated from the production of cute-kawaii femininity as a form and an identity. What for him would be play is labor, literally in Mrs. Wilson's case, and aspirationally in Baby's.

Mrs. Wilson's disavowal of her own agency is significant because it suggests that

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[571]McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 125
[572]McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 126
[573]McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 127

her suppression of Baby's is, from her perspective, both prescient and predetermined, either good for Baby or beyond Mrs. Wilson's control. Her assumption of shared affect, even as it centers her identity on caring for Baby, legitimates the commodification of Baby as an innocent survival tactic. Baby, despite being a child, is assumed to "know" in the same way Mrs. Wilson does, that her commodification is what's best for her. However, as in Bubber's case, the exercise of power here does not disqualify Mrs. Wilson from cute-kawaii. In fact, it facilitates the undecidability between the cute-kawaii's innocence and the acute's cunning as Mrs. Wilson becomes so agitated by Biff's line of questioning that, amidst her various rationalizations and evasions, she begins to cry and when she sits up "there is a red spot on each of her cheeks."[574] The flush of her cheeks is not explicitly a blush, and parallels the pinch-pinkening of Baby's cheeks. Not knowing whether the color signifies anger or embarrassment, whether her tears are a tactical evasion of agency or the inadvertent admission of complicity, does not alter that Mrs. Wilson becomes cuter by them. The indeterminacy indexed by her expression is an indeterminacy not just of power, who has and who uses it, but an indeterminacy of being. Her expressions appeal to our sympathies, even as the context in which they're performed call into question their sincerity, and her innocence. Blushing, alongside winking, is among cute-*kawaii*'s paradigmatic expressions. Blushing is associated with an intrinsic vulnerability of the object, as "a social act that performs a position of powerlessness and thus symbolizes those in less powerful positions." It expresses vulnerability in that it is "self-revelatory," as "one's emotions are exposed bodily," and the expression is culturally

[574]McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 129

associated with "certain individuals or categories of persons who may blush more easily than others.'[575]'

In particular, Yano writes, blushing is the purview of a "socialized child," which suggests "knowledge is critical for triggering this form," as the recognition of a taboo. Yano's conception of the blush, however, over-estimates its legibility, and dislocates its vulnerability. The blush is a supplement that must be read. While the blush of child-shame might arise from an understood failure to meet social expectations, it does not therefore follow that the blush arises only in response to this circumstance, or that the vulnerability expressed is purely passive. As an aspect of cute-*kawaii*, the involuntary blood-rush of a blush should be understood as indexing an instability of innocence in which the expressiveness of the body is discursively expressionless: it *seems* to mean. To blush is to seem to admit to knowingly doing wrong. At the same time, blushing imputes provisional innocence because it suggests a concern for wrong-doing that calls into question the nature of the wrong. Rather than *willed* mis-doing, blushing figures action as that which *had* to be done according to (epistemological, economic, bodily) circumstance. The blush defends bodily what is vulnerable discursively by showing the accused did not lack understanding but constructed it in accordance with their circumstance. The blushing faces of Mrs. Wilson and her daughter are formal expressions with conventionally understood meanings, but the conventional meanings are here called into question. It is not possible, ultimately, to decide between the exasperated blush of the powerless Mrs. Wilson, unable to refuse her ideological condition, and the embarrassed

[575] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 35

blush of a Mrs. Wilson empowered by her complicity with that ideological condition. The blush asserts at the same time that it exposes that Mrs. Wilson's aesthetic cutification of her daughter is inextricable from the cutification of herself, conscious or unconscious, by normative ideologies of gender and capital.

Note: being cute-*kawaii* does not absolve wrong-doing. As Spivak argues, the responsibility to respond should not become an abstract duty by which a subject can refuse other responsibilities: "We must continue to know, and to make known...which is the least grave...complicity."[576] Cute-kawaii merely brings our awareness of an unavoidable complicity, one implicit in Nadia de Vries' claim that "We feel a strange attraction to cute consumables because, in various ways, we feel just like them."[577] The ethical potential here is demonstrated by Mick, for whom the indeterminacy of Bubber's innocence, both in the legal sense of perpetration and punishment, and the ideological sense of prelapsarian child purity, causes Bubber's and her own cute-*kawaii* affect to intensify. In the aftermath of the shooting Bubber flees. When she finds him, Mick doesn't strike Bubber, as she once did to stop him from playing with himself in public. Instead, she tells him that Baby is dead, that the Warden of Sing-Sing, a signifier familiar to Bubber from radio plays, is preparing "little electric chairs" for him, and describes how "when they turn on the juice you just fry up like a piece of burnt bacon. Then you go to Hell."[578] It is at this moment that Bubber's cuteness intensifies for Mick: "The words were so awful-sounding in the dark that a shiver came over her. She could feel Bubber

[576] Spivak, "Responsibility," 25
[577] De Vries, "," 270
[578] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 169

trembling."[579] The grotesque doubling of open bodies reappears in a more minor register. At first the shiver is impersonal, ambiguous: it is not clear whether it originates from within Mick, or is her body's reaction to the drafty tree house they're huddled in, or if the words themselves are truly so "awful-sounding" they function like an incantation, conjuring a chill. The next sentence is a logical non sequitur. It is not clear that "trembling" is equivalent to "shivering," though they both entail vibrations of the flesh.

It is only by becoming attuned to the underlying affect, the sense that quivering flesh *signifies something* even if what it signifies is uncertain, that the two sentences can be united, and it becomes possible to read Mick's shiver as responding to Bubber's trembling, as the echo of the affect she (thought she) imposed on *him*. Thus, the impossibility of the ethical, for Spivak, derives from an unthinkable necessity: "to imagine this woman as an Other as well as a self." The gap between self and other can only be overcome through "the image of the other as self produced by imagination supplementing knowledge or its absence," but because "imagination is structurally unverifiable" the figure can succeed only partially.[580] While the impossibility remains, the cute-*kawaii* poignancy of the scene, in which children innocently deploy and receive figures in ignorance of what is deployed and received, suggests a fuller realization of the ethical through the cute-kawaii mode of supplementarity. The negation of subjecthood in the experience of cute-kawaii here is also the dis-posing of oneself toward another, disclosing a self that is simultaneously external and internal—what one becomes in

[579] Ibid.
[580] Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in an Age of Globalization*, 104

relation to others beyond one's control. As her intentions erode to intensity and Mick responds to Bubber's cuteness, she herself becomes cute-*kawaii* with regard to the power she invokes, about which she is revealed to be more naive than Bubber. His affect suggests Bubber already feels what Mick presumes to teach him: shame, guilt, or regret. The acuity of the shiver confronts Mick with Bubber's non-identity, his otherness from the object she imagined him to be, with regard to whom *she* is guilty. In fact, Mick's actions cause Bubber harm beyond the unfolding of the incident.

At the level of social consequence the narrative frames the incident as one in which Bubber accedes to normative adult masculinity. Either *by* slaying or *because* he slayed the feminine cuteness antithetical to it, he'll no longer be known as "Bubber," but "Baby Killer" or "George," and he will not let Mick "snug up to him." Bubber and Mick, formerly roommates, are divided by sexual difference, and he is exiled from the queer wonders of childhood androgyny. The "sole positive attribute" of ideological innocence, Kevin Ohi argues, "is its irrecoverability, it is legible only from the retrospective perspective of its demise."[581] Its emptiness is a "pure" emptiness that resists qualification not because it is unqualifiable, but because it is permitted only the quality of emptiness. At first Bubber's loss of innocence accords with this model. Mick observes Bubber "was a different kid—George—going around by himself always like a person much older and with nobody, not even her, knowing what was really in his mind."[582] What the novel makes clear is Mick *never* knew what Bubber was "really" thinking, and it is possible to

[581] Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture,* 6
[582] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 179, 180

read Mick's recognition of Bubber's unknowability as the loss of a knowably empty innocence. However, the loss of innocence is also, here, the coming into cuteness that re-establishes innocence adverbially—Bubber comes to appear innocently to Mick. After affect has been exchanged, and Mick subjected to the ghost of the feeling she gave Bubber, she restates her description of Bubber's acuity in cuter terms: "Bubber was always so thin and little and smart. She would kill anybody that tried to send that kid out of the family. She wanted to kiss him and bite him because she loved him so much."[583] Not only more intensely, but with simpler verbiage, Mick's assessment appears both more absolute ("always so," "kill anybody"), and more unreal.

Mick affects what Adorno describes as the "playful element" that marks partial recognition of nonidentity. Knowing how far we remain from a thing's non-identity we "always talk as if we had it entirely," bringing us "to the point of clowning" because "our clownish traits... alone can give us hope for what is denied us."[584] As an aspect of cute affect, innocence appears not to be unqualifiably empty, but rather to call attention to the emptiness of qualification—an intuition of non-identity that weakens the language of judgment. The cutification of Mick's language demonstrates the potential recurrence of innocence, as the sudden awareness of an insufficient knowing wherein language, admitting its own weakness, infantilizes itself. An example common to both texts puts a bow on it: Baby Wilson's pink frock is insistently referred in McCullers as a "costume," equates with the numerous Western and Japanese "costumes" with which Joji adorns

[583] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 172
[584] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 14

Naomi. In both cases. By referring to what are functionally everyday clothes, both authors effectively mimic a linguistic-conceptual confusion common to children in which the concept to which words refer does not map neatly onto an adult's categorical understanding of the concept, being sometimes too broad, as when all four-legged animals are dogs, and sometimes too narrow, as when only the family dog is a pet."[585] "Costume" is an abstraction from "dress" that simplifies by flattening the conceptual categories. If a "dress" is clothing that performs femininity, a costume is more broadly and more simply clothing that performs. The abstraction calls attention to the "dress" as a cute-object in itself, as an object that seems to perform femininity, and is feminine by virtue of that performance, rather than an object that is essentially feminine by virtue of its form. Abstracting "costume" from "dress" thus more accurately reflects the reality of gender as socially constructed than a categorically appropriate use of the terms would allow. Unornamented, abstract, the cutified exploratory language of the child presents not an *inaccurate,* but an otherly understanding of the world.

[585] Mervis, "," 201

CHAPTER FOUR

UNCANNY ANTHROPOMORPHISMS: MIRRORS, MOTHERESE, AND WONDERING ABOUT CUTE-*KAWAII* MIMESIS

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When I brought them home, I could not distinguish between Osmond and Basil except with a clear view of the patterns on their backs. Presumed brothers. Oz and Baz were both black-and-white hooded rats, with dark heads, white bodies, and black markings. Though Osmond was the more rotund by half, his squishy rat-body could become flat as a puddle or streamlined as a bullet. Consequently, I could discern their identities only by observing the difference between Osmond's black line, and Basil's black arrow. A month or so through the looking glass, I experienced something curious: I began to see their faces. By this I mean both that I became more discerning with regards to their unique physiognomies, and that their brute sensory organs began to appear to me *as* physiognomies—as indexes of the interiority of another. I could identify that Osmond's ears were further apart, and that Basil's snout was longer, but moreover I began to believe I could identify particular expressions. Black, and blank as a button, I could nonetheless see in the eyes of my rats when they wanted to play, and when they intended to taste whatever forbidden fruit I forbade them.

Much to my partner's amazement, I eventually had *only* to look into their eyes to reliably tell them apart. Osmond has an air of haughty severity, I'd explain, and always

seems quite inconvenienced by you; Basil regards everything with a cautious but eager curiosity. The day Oz died I knew at a glance because he was not wearing his usual supercilious expression. In contrast with his brother Basil, whose vigorous sniffing as the veterinary technician carried him away attested to his adventurous spirit, Osmond regarded his medical caregiver with suspicion. Looking into his eyes for the last time, he seemed to me to wonder why he could not have died in bed at home. Of course, *he* could not understand his circumstances, structured as they were by human modes of meaning. He could hear the veterinarian explain to me that owners are not allowed to be with small pets during their euthanization—because as doctors try to strike a vein the squirming in the latter often induces squirming in the former—but, it signified nothing to him.

What is interesting about this experience in the context of the cute-*kawaii* is that it seems that his *meaning* (to seek care from), and that *my* meaning (to give care to him) were recognized, and that their recognition was facilitated by what appear as the "master tropes" of cute-*kawaii*: "giving face," and anthropomorphism. In my case, the *semblance* of confusion and concern that I registered as his response to circumstances appeared as a transformation in facial expression *comparable* with a human being's. That the veterinarian observed that owners commonly seemed to share in the perceived suffering of their pets likewise attests to a tendency to equate the meaning of the "form" of squirming across the human and the nonhuman. Both suggest a relationship between affect, significance, and meaning that exceed rational signification in human language. Furthermore, both are at odds with extant readings of the cute-*kawaii* as an imperialistic, assimilative form of anthropomorphism that aims to "annihilate otherness, ruthlessly

suppresses the nonhuman, and allows nothing...to be separate and distinct from us."[586]

These readings are in accordance with an ethos of the critical tradition that "resists the temptation to anthropomorphize the alien,"[587] and is quite reasonably suspicious of attempts to expropriate the language and image of Others in order to express the self. In Osmond's case, however, had I resisted my urge "to assign, interpret, or project" his expressions I risked another kind of "violence or stupidity," which "would consist in suspending my compassion" in the face of Oz's suffering, and "depriving the animal of every power of manifestation," including the ability to seek aid, and "to manifest to me in some way *its* experience of *my* language."[588] How could I, who had for two years been treated by Osmond like his couch or his refrigerator, disregard his attempt to treat me as a doctor? Rather than "the cute vision of the natural world" being "a world without nature,"[589] I contend that cute-*kawaii* affect effaces the figure of the human being, and nature as the figure of non-human, to posit the possibility of the becoming human of nature *as nature*, and the recognition of being human as being with or alongside the human. The converse of the profligate cute-*kawaii*'s protean permutations, the cute-*kawaii* also involves wondering about the possibilities of the human and the non-human sharing in their resemblance to one another.

The relationship between the cute-*kawaii* and the power of appearing human has been addressed in the literature as a function of cute-*kawaii*'s penchant for *prosopopoeia*

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[586] Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic*, 12
[587] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 89
[588] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* 387
[589] Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic*, 12

and anthropomorphism specifically, and mimesis more generally. "Unusually mimetic" the experience of the cute-*kawaii* seems to proliferate structures and tropes of repetition, reflection, and identification. Beyond the subject's "automatic mimesis" of the cute-*kawaii* thing's "infantile qualities" in the subject's cutified language,[590] the constellated tropes of cute-kawaii mimesis include *personification, prosopopoeia, apostrophe, anthropomorphism,* and *mentalizing*, or "the ability to imagine the mental states of others, including interpreting—or misinterpreting—the facial expressions of animals and even inanimate objects."[591] In cute-kawaii studies these terms tend to be used interchangeably, with the assumption that to address an inanimate object as if it were a subject necessarily involves an equivalence between the face and the human, and human language and address. However, although the tropes of *personification, prosopopoeia, apostrophe, anthropomorphism,* and *mentalizing* are related, they are not identical, and confusion between them distorts accounts of cute-*kawaii*'s mimetic faculty. Despite this, my goal is not to fully clarify the distinctions between them, but to understand why cute-*kawaii* is able to mobilize, interpose, and hybridize these modes of conceptualizing the in/commensurability of human and non-human beings, and the possibilities of *appearing as* a human being.

We circle back to the address of a cute-*kawaii* face, *prosopopoeia*, and the cute-*kawaii*'s tendency for appearing as anthropomorphic. Like the address of Derrida's *revenant*, the hyper-mimetic cute-*kawaii* "hesitates...between address as *experience*,

[590] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 3
[591] Dale, 18

address as *education*, and address as *taming* or *training*."[592] What does it mean for the body of a rat to splay, to slow, to squirm? I could essay a response only in the context of how I have experienced splaying, slowing, and squirming and how my rat had trained me to respond to him. In the end, my response was made, and resolved, while still wondering whether Osmond would have rather died at home with his brothers. Wonder, constitutive aspect of the cute-*kawaii* in Cross's conception of it as "wondrous innocence" appears as an affect obtaining in what might appear as a human face, being, or meaning regardless of what it *is*. In fact, "wonder" is etymologically derived from an interstice between face and meaning. Deriving from "the Latin equivalent *mirabilia*, which became both the marvelous and the miraculous in English" Cross traces wonder's root to the Indo-European verb "*miror* (smile).'"[593] Linking "wonder" to the verb "to smile" might appear to charge the concept with a positive affect, and "stick" the *form* of the smile to the *concept* of joy. However, Sara Ahmed reminds us, "what passes through the passing around of happy objects remains an open question."[594] In the wild a smile must be *read*, and interpreted in the context of its material affectivity. The smile can only be a *sign* of *something happening*: the material happening of a sign. It cannot be evenly decomposed into signifiers and signifieds because what is signified is only the signifier (as signified) in its unqualified significance. A smile has only "significant function." Cute-*kawaii* wonder thus maintains a powerful ambivalence. It draws our attention to particular phenomena as *significant* but does not resolve the question of what kind of *significance*.

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[592] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, *xviii*
[593] Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 25
[594] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 38

This is in keeping with Phil Fisher's understanding of wonder as an affect at the limit of rational intelligibility, a feeling that exists at the border between aesthetic experience and scientific knowing. He writes, "Wonder drives and sustains the defective rationality that gives us intelligibility" and compares it with the "Socratic moment of knowing one's ignorance, knowing that one does not know. It operates, accordingly, in two modalities as both a verb signifying interrogation and as an exclamative or an honorific. We regard things as wonderful when they excite our curiosity without satisfying it. Convergent with this interpretation is Fisher's assessment of the form of wonder as the inkling of the emergence of a form or pattern prior to intelligibility. Wonder attends to the relationships between things, attuned to endless resemblances, repetitions, diversions, and differences, involving the material and the virtual. Circling again we return to the anthropomorphic, which appears now almost identical to the affect of wonder. "An anthropomorphic element in perception," writes Jane Bennett, "can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances—sounds and sights that echo and bounce far more than would be possible were the universe to have a hierarchical structure."[595] Cute-*kawaii*'s wondrous anthropomorphism triggers an expanded responsiveness to the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman through undetermined modes of resemblance.

To that end I want to focus on the specific wonder cute-*kawaii* provokes with regard to the face and the human as it manifests in the context of Woolf's London and Soseki's Tokyo. The slippage between *prosopopoeia* and *anthropomorphism* within the

[595] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 99

scholarship of the cute-kawaii corresponds with the slippage between the face and the body as discursive markers of being human and human meaning in the age of globalization, modernization, and westernization. Representing the ambiguity and instability inherent in modern figurations of the face as the locus of psychological identity, and therefore human being understood as a rational autonomous subject, both authors concern themselves with how "the face," as well particular faces and facial expressions, comes to signify the human. Encounters between the narrators of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Light and Dark* with images of a human face in nonhuman objects convey us from the question of the aesthetic perception of human form within the formal system of signification to the affective responsiveness to human form as it occurs in 'nature.' The cute-*kawaii* "human," as it appears in these works does not delimit conceptual content, but describes an intimacy felt to be *none other than human*. In the argument that follows we will first review discussions of *mimesis*, *prosopopoeia* and *anthropomorphism* in the cute-*kawaii*, and then articulate another model by observing how the cute-*kawaii* face appears in Woolf and Soseki.

The Uncanny, Modernity, and Cute-*Kawaii*

Literally "to give face," *prosopopoeia* is perhaps the most commonly discussed trope of cute-*kawaii*. Describing it as cute-*kawaii*'s "master-trope," Ngai writes, "in cuteness, it is crucial that the object has some sort of imposed upon mien—that is, that it bears the look of an object unusually responsive to and thus easily shaped or deformed by the subject's feelings or attitude toward it."[596] Seeming to enact the power differential

[596] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 65

between subject and object, *prosopopoeia* imagines a mute being capable of understanding human speech, and responding to the speaker, but whose muteness enables the speaker to project their own interests onto the object. While *prosopopoeia* "confers addressability" on its object, it appears necessary that the object remains "inanimate" since it is "the silence of a thing that makes it have no awareness or irony to interfere with the addressee's animation."[597] However, Affirming the subject's position through its imagined imitation, the object thus imagined nevertheless retains its status as object. The thing's silence preserves an otherness in the object ascribed a face, and the otherness of the object endowed with human speech provokes a crisis. As de Man writes, "the symmetrical structure of *prosopopoeia* implies, by the same token that the living human speaker who personifies or throws voice into the nonhuman object can be struck dumb,"[598] or as Ngai summarizes: "if things can be personified, persons can be made things."[599]

For Ngai that the cute-*kawaii* object remains mute implies that "although the object must be given just enough face to enable it to empathetically return our gaze, a fuller personification becomes impossible," because to do so "would symbolically render that object our equal and "erase the power differential on which the aesthetic depends."[600] Thus, while de Man associates "giving face" with "endowing speech," Ngai argues that "'giving face' in cuteness seems to amount to denying speech."[601] However, while the

[597] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 186
[598] Paul de Man, "Autobiography and De-Facement," 24
[599] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 91-96
[600] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 91-96
[601] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 91-96

poetic speaker's use of *prosopopoeia* elevates the language of the subject above his object, the subjective experience of the cute-kawaii *does* seem to erase or ease the differential by deforming the subject's language. Indeed, part of the pleasure of the cute-*kawaii* seems to derive from "being cut" down to size by it.[602] If the cute-*kawaii* is only the subject's response to an object, the subject should retain linguistic competence. Instead, unable to cause the cute-kawaii object to speak, we respond to it in the language we imagine it possessing. Consequently, despite being cute-*kawaii*'s 'master trope,' *prosopopoeia* always fails to master the thing it tropes. In fact, we will see, it appears to *personify* us in *its* image.

The cute-*kawaii* tropes of *prosopopoeia* and *anthropomorphism,* and the affect of wonder becomes attached in the modernist context to emergent discourses of subjecthood, personhood, faces, the uncanny, and the human (interior) and the natural (exterior)—on either side of every ocean. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" Virginia Woolf asserts that "on or about December 1910 human character changed," a diagnosis she makes on the basis of, and in service to "the men and women who began writing novels in 1910 or thereabouts," who find themselves unable to "create characters which seem real"—by which she explicitly does not "mean lifelike,"[603] but the "direct sense of the oddity and significance of some character" that is "different, quite different"[604] from what it appears to be. Woolf attributes this to the influence of the Georgian writers, whose insistence on social realism produced novels that were not interested in "character

[602] Dale, *Affects and Aesthetics of Cuteness*,
[603] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 4, 11
[604] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 19-20

in itself," but "something outside"—the material facts of their social conditions. Natsume Soseki, writing in Tokyo having studied in London, appears to address a similar problem in his *Theory of Literature*. Dissatisfied with his experience studying at Oxford, which left him feeling "cheated by English literature,"[605] Soseki described the attempt to understand literary value by reading literature as attempting to "wash blood with blood." Instead, he resolved to study the "psychological" and "social *necessity*" of literary objects.[606] Beginning from the outside in, as opposed to inside out, Soseki's conclusions nonetheless resemble Woolf's.

Proffering Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, an example Woolf also uses, Soseki's theorization of literature similarly centers on the "sense of recognition" which occurs in a reader when the novel "skillfully distills its characters in a normal state," *and simultaneously* contains "within" itself "all the possibilities for change that might arise in response to extreme circumstances."[607] In the works of both novelists the interplay between inner experience and outer reality is registered both thematically and stylistically by the appearance of cute-*kawaii* tropes. The giving and taking of face is rendered narratively through both author's use of free indirect discourse, while questions of human form, and the possibilities of understanding human meaning are represented as entangled with the modern, rationalistic disciplines of psychology and medicine, involving the binary assumed in psychoanalysis of a visible, but inscrutable exterior which belies an inchoate, inaccessible interior, and that manifests in the course of Japan's modernization

[605] Soseki, "Preface" from *Theory of Literature*, 43-44
[606] Ibid.
[607] Soseki, "Preface" from *Theory of Literature*, 111

and westernization in a process Kojin Karatani calls "facialization." In both, the question of appearing as human inevitably revolves around the undecidability between appearing and being human—the suspension in wonder between perceiving and identifying a real or merely represented consciousness.

In the context of the global capitalist modernity in which Soseki and Woolf are entrenched, the human face becomes a locus for what appears as an irrational apprehension of human significance prior to discerning a human subject (as the object of knowledge). A shift in the status of the face is registered, explicitly by Karatani in a process he describes as "facialization"; implicitly in the post-Enlightenment phenomenon Terry Castle describes as "spectralization." Without engaging with the broadest assertions made by Karatani and Castle, the terms usefully circle a tension between the psychological and affective experience of the human that appears endemic to the particular forms of 20th century global capitalist modernity, and might be characterized as either, or both, an uncanny or wondrous cute-*kawaii*. For both theorists, and in both novelists the human face (and human being) undergoes apparent transversals "psychology" and "religious discourse."[608] Although Karatani argues for a particularly Japanese perception of the face, invoking Levi-Strauss he embeds his argument in a much broader conception of the relationship of human beings to human faces, one which appears to be in tension with a post-Enlightenment conception of the human being as *knowable*, and the human subject as opposed to the objects of its knowledge. And in all, the modern, psychological person is opposed to an earlier, more immediate apprehension

[608]Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 187

of the human: a "sensuous" perception of the face capable of engendering "social existence, human dignity, and spiritual meaning," and functioning as "the open, public greeting of the Other...emitting prohibitions," which invites "speech and ethics,"[609] since "exposed to the one who could do violence to it...It acknowledges any violence done to *it* as its own."[610]

What is significant about the historical shifts in episteme described by both Karatani and Castle is not related to specific assertions with regard to particular cultures or periods, but how "facialization" and "spectralization" appear as nearly identical processes within 20th century global modernity, and deeply entangled with the tropes and material cultures of the cute-*kawaii*. "Facialization," for Karatani, describes the emergence of a psychologized face which "signifies interiority," and in the Japanese context as a consequence of the interrelated processes of modernization and westernization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The production of an "interior" requires the simultaneous production of a distinct "exterior" which for Karatani is signified by the emergence of landscape painting as a genre in Japan since the invention of the subjective interior generates an external object world to be known by it. Thus, the face as a "significant" object assumes the stability of the human as a rational agent present to itself through language, and to others through voice, as well as the stability of our perception and conceptualization of objects, including the face itself.[611] In the early 20th century literary and visual culture of *shoujo* this face, which secures identity,

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[609] Ibid.
[610] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 187
[611] Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, (56-57)

appears in tension with the cute-*kawaii* face to which we respond *without regard* for its identity. An early vehicle for cute-*kawaii* characters in Japan, the visual and literary culture of pre-WWII *shoujo* appears to originate with the cute-*kawaii* motif of mirroring and mimicking.

Visually this manifested as “tendency to make all characters look the same" and to “all have similar facial features” such that possible ethnic markers were abstracted away. However, these mirrored faces were almost accompanied by androgynous “bodies [dressed] in opposing Japanese and foreign outfits.”[612] The uncanny effect of mirroring faces, and Othered bodies does not affirm the psychological “interiority” of a rational subject, and the tropes of mimesis and *prosopopoeia* in this context do not appear to be simply an ”assimilation of difference”[613] into “sameness” as it has been argued about the cute-*kawaii*. Instead, the abstract mirroring of faces presents a possibility of sharing in significance that exposes the more radical emptiness of the *sign* of the face. Rather, the possibility of an interiority is encountered as a pure exteriority—as merely a sign of *what might be a sign*. The cute-*kawaii* face involves the possibility of *repetition with a difference*, a mimetic process that does not secure signification or identification, but enables a responsiveness to possible significance.

The subordination of a sensuous responsiveness to what appears as a human face to a rationalizing, schematizing mode of psychological signification also appears in a phenomenon Terry Castle describes as ”the spectralization or ‘ghostifying’ of mental

[612] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendships*, 67-68
[613] Ibid.

space."[614] Nascent in the 18th century, burgeoning in the 20th, the turn towards a psychological conception of the human subject described by Castle and others also involves negotiation between sameness and difference, and interior and exterior. Ending with Freud, the process inherits both the Platonic devaluation of *mimesis* and the Christian prohibition against idolatry, which targeted animist beliefs regarding "the possible aliveness of the inanimate" as both a threat to the privileged position of human beings, but also ontological hierarchy more generally since if the "possibility of coming alive" is "present in a statue" then the possibility of an object's divinity is also always "uncannily near." [615] This repression of the possibility of the non-human appearing-as human repeats and intensifies in the European Enlightenment, now repressing the possibility of the human being body. The advance of the Protestant, Capitalist values of rationality, efficiency and productivity necessitated "a war against our body, making it a signifier for all that is limited, material, and opposed to reason" in order to assert the mind's difference from and power to instrumentalize the body.[616] As in the case of everything repressed, however, the possibility of a sensuous apprehension of the human returns as in spectralization, the "latent irrationalism haunting...the rationalist conception of mind."[617]

As the Enlightenment proceeded with its project of demystification, "dispensing with 'primitive' or 'animistic' forms of thought and substituting new rationalized modes

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[614] Ibid.
[615] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 136
[616] Sylvia Federicci, *Re-Enchanting the World*, 190
[617] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 142-143

of explanation," what was previously experienced as a perception of a quasi-human spirit in the world of things, the apprehension of ghosts, divinities, and other supernatural wonders were absorbed "into the world of thought."[618] That is, what had previously signaled the violability of the human to the non-human world was transformed during the course of the Enlightenment into a sign of the human subject's absolute dominion over the world of objects, and the world of objects was accordingly transformed into the mere projection of a psychologically dysfunctional subject. The apotheosis of this discourse occurs in the modernist period. As texts like Woolf's "A Haunted House" attest, "By the time of Freud, the rhetorical pattern had resolved...into a cultural pathology: everyone felt 'haunted."[619] The turn-of-the-century inversion by which Karatani's figural face comes to signify the interior of a psychological subject is another turn of the screw in the history of the human face in the West, which has strived to exclude everything but the autonomous reasoning subject from the form of the human. It is with Freud too, that we find the strongest link between the cute-*kawaii* and the history of the human form, since it is "precisely at the moment that the 'marvelous' is dislodged and 'sober truth' elevated in its stead, the possibility of the uncanny...comes into being.[620]"

This suggests that what Cross considers the cute-*kawaii*'s conflation of *wonder* and *innocence* in the wondrous naivete of the innocent child is the mirror image of what is commonly called the uncanny. A strong correlation between the cute-*kawaii* and the uncanny has already been identified by Simon May, who sketches a continuum of cute-

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[618] Ibid.
[619] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 167
[620] Castle, *The Female Thermometer,* 14

kawaii affect. Toward one end are "those charming qualities that conjure an existence of perfect innocence, pliancy, and dependence, unburdened by contradiction and complexity"; At the other end, "things become more poignantly or uncannily cute" as their sweetness coincides with "something unsafe, elusive, alienated, artful, menacing, knowing, apprehensive, absurdist, resilient."[621] The uncanniness of cute-*kawaii* is strongly associated, for May, with the grotesque and 'monstrousness' as an aesthetic of improbable hybrids, and cute-*kawaii* is most interesting to May when it appears uncanny. However, what appears to be 'merely sweet' displays already a degree of the uncanny. For, if the uncanny "is about the strange *within* the familiar, the strangely familiar, the familiar as strange," and "the way in which the domestic world does not coincide with itself"[622] then it necessarily appears alongside the possibility of cute-*kawaii*. Although May wryly claims this 'complex' cute-*kawaii* "is for adults, and children older than six or seven,"[623] the Freudian uncanny in fact "depends" upon the unconscious persistence of an "infantile belief" through the processes of rationalization and repression. It is only because our infantile feelings have been "distorted by repression" that we experience "horror and uneasiness at the thought of a doll moving like a human being."[624]

Consequently, the things that comprise the "theme-index" and "itemized topology" of the uncanny also comprise the topology of the cute-*kawaii* including "doubles, dancing dolls, and automata," the "alter egos, and 'mirror' selves"[625] of

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[621] May, *The Power of Cute*, 23-25
[622] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 10
[623] Ibid.
[624] Castle, *The Female Thermometer,* 10
[625] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 4-5

children playing pretend, as well as "the influence of entities or objects that should not possess reflective agency...animals, telepathic forces, fate itself."[626] That "*repetition* and *doubling*," which are "themselves an uncanny pair which *double and repeat* each other" are central to the uncanny further suggests a link between it and the innocent wonder of the cute-*kawaii*. The experience of wonder is precisely an intuition of the possibility of pattern without the certainty of its resolution into fact. Recreating the nesting-doll of parent and child, the rationalization-repression that produces the uncanny is reproduced as an intergenerational disciplinary practice: "Each of us was once taught that to see things that no one else could see, to envision monsters or phantoms or strange figures at the foot of the bed, was really to *imagine*."[627] The modern subject is thus constructed via a "primal internalization of the spectral,"[628] which is to say the repression of the possibility of *being affected by* a perceived spirit of things. What appears as the cute-*kawaii* in the following scenes from Woolf and Soseki appears as the return of a "spectral *someone other*" who "*looks at us*...even before or beyond any look on our part," prior to appearing to be "self, subject, person, consciousness or spirit," and to which we respond.[629]

The historical processes obtaining in the facialization of the modern Japanese novel are themselves the repetition of a process which occurred earlier in the intellectual history of the west, and uncanny parallels emerge between the status of the (exterior) face

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[626] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 65
[627] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 143
[628] Ibid.
[629] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 7

and human (interior). Shamoon's description of the prose style of *shojo* writers, for instance, could reasonably be applied to the Woolfian stream of consciousness. Not only does it feature a "decorative prose style, and particularly the tendency to break sentences into poetic fragments" but is also an "attempt to portray the inner monologue of their characters in a convincing, sympathetic way" by using colloquial language to create a "sense of orality and hence immediacy and authenticity."[630] Stream of consciousness, like the unreadable face, is not a straightforward affirmation of the subject's interiority, but involves the perception of what ambiguously appears as to mean something human to the human that perceives it. That is, stream of consciousness suggests not the interiority of a subject, but that the human and the face are necessarily exterior to a subject, and its interpretative faculties—a matter of being affected. At first glance, Soseki's sparse, exacting prose appears dissimilar to both Woolf and *shojou*, While Woolf's narration participates in a modernist impulse to complicate the relationship between subjects and objects, speakers, persons, and things, Soseki's narration insists upon the distinction between them. Notably, this insistence derives from, and distinguishes, Soseki's experience of global modernity as a Japanese writer, which is nonetheless entangled with and appears to uncannily resemble Woolf's experience.

A resemblance deferred, and a repetition with a difference, Reiko Abe Austad notes that "By the time Meian reached a Western audience, the "mimetic" realism of nineteenth century England, which had inspired Soseki, was no longer prominent in the West," where already modernist novelists "were experimenting with various new forms

[630] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendships*, 79

of "realism" in which "authorial" narration with a clear distinction between narratorial and "figural" language was giving way to...a fragmentary and disorderly picture of the characters' inner experiences," and which emphasized "immediacy and the intensity of the character's emotional quality."[631] Reiko Abe Auestad observes the irony that "given modern skepticism toward classical "realism" and "transparent" language," Soseki might have found that "a more typically Japanese style of writing which calls the reader's attention to the personified voice of the narrator and to the linguistic situation of his writing, might have appeared more appealing"[632] to his Western audience. Indeed, we can recall that it was the specificity of the Japanese first-person pronoun which endeared the language to Joyce. Furthermore, the resemblance between Soseki's modernism and 19th century realism, Auestad argues, has "led to a standardized and stagnant emphasis on how these works approximate the European realistic novel" which she links both implicitly and explicitly to modern discourse about a particular kind of modern, rational, psychological human. She notes, for instance, that "critics have been inclined to pay exclusive attention to the characters' psyche in terms of such supposedly "universal" features as "egoism" or "individualism."

These analyses assume the framework of a particular kind of psychological subjectivity, as well as the possibility of a coherent, knowable, and narrativizable world. Not only does this constitute, as Auestad argues, "a failure to qualify these notions by considering the specific historical, social and cultural conditions governing everyday life

[631] Reiko Abe Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 241
[632] Reiko Abe Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 242

of Soseki's characters."[633]

To represent human beings as "modern" individuals required Soseki to depart from conventional Japanese literary style because the grammatical structure of Japanese presented "linguistic constraints...which made it unsuitable for the objective representation of reality" as it appeared in English realism. [634] In Japanese "the distinctions between first and third person narratives, between indirect and direct discourses, and between "narrated and non-narrated" poles of discourse, are often not very clear," and thus third person indirect discourse does not secure "the same kind of distance between the narrator and the character," and thus "the points of view tend to combine" with "the third person narrator...and the character readily merging into a single voice."[635] To avert the comingling of different persons, and the ontological blurring of author, narrator, and character Soseki starkly "distinguishes the language of the narrator from that of the characters," such "*Meian* is dominated by two opposing styles, namely, overt narration in a neutral and rather artificial style and quoted dialogues in a natural everyday conversational style."[636] This formal construction is reflected and reaffirmed in Soseki's tendency to describe "characters and events from various spatial and temporal perspectives, often emphasizing their "multiplicity" by contrast or comparison."[637] Formally opposed, Soseki's Japanese modernist 'realism,' and the fragmentary, free indirect discourse of Woolf's Bloomsbury modernist, appear to negotiate the same

[633] Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 230
[634] Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 237-39
[635] Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 237-39
[636] Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 237-39
[637] Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 237-39

tension between a conception of the human being consistent with a strict subject / object distinction, and the affective experience of the human that appears cute-*kawaii*.

Although they appear to travel along different historical trajectories, both Woolf's lyricism and Soseki's sparsity appear as or affect a departure from a known form of human meaning to respond to another, unknown form. To treat *Meian* merely as imitation realism additionally fails to account for the specific affective conditions depicted in and elicited by the novel, parallel to an affect depicted in and elicited in Woolf. The assumption of an "individual" actor is recapitulated in the assumption of a purely "unilateral" imitation or influence of the realist novel on Soseki's writing. In either figuration, cause and effect are clearly established, allowing us to neatly delineate subject and object. However, what appears as cute-*kawaii* in Woolf and Soseki does not appear to be necessarily related by cause and effect, as in the tropes of realism, but merely by resemblance. This is not to suggest a universal experience of cute-*kawaii* or modernity, but to show how these two phenomena appear entangled in Woolf and Soseki, and how that entanglement causes them to appear entangled with each other. Soseki's novels are not merely imitations of a Western realism; nor is Woolf's lyrical indirectness a manifestation of human essence, Japanese or general. Both, however, register as cute-*kawaii* in the ways their texts attempt to reconcile the experience of affect with a modern conception of a rational, autonomous individual. Thus Frederic Jameson notes that in Soseki we might be surprised to discover "the simultaneous existence of the two distinct and seemingly antithetical distortions of narrative raw material observable in the West," his works exhibiting "on the one hand, a postulation of enormous length and distention"

that recalls the constitutive formlessness of both the novel, and the cute-*kawaii*; and, "on the other hand, a minimalism tending toward a veritable instant without duration, continuity and discontinuity" that both aligns it with the "radical stylization" of modernist writers like Woolf and Joyce, and suggests the formal simplicity of the cute-*kawaii*.[638]

Structurally, the massive and formless "narrative flow" of *Meian* is made diminutive and digestible by distributing the novel "into small numbered sections" that has the effect of "combining the minute with the infinite."[639] More clearly distinguished than the sections of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which pivot and flow subtly and abruptly between characters, the manner in which both novels attempt to assemble multiple and ambiguous forms of human being evinces a cute-*kawaii* impulse to collect, gather, or enjoin—and which insists upon relation and response-ability in the absence of their certainty. Thus despite the post-Enlightenment individualism attributed to Tsuda, the protagonist of *Meian*, Soseki's novel consistently undermines the appearance of an autonomous, rational, masterful subject, exposing "the complex mechanism by which [the characters] regardless of their intentions, become involved with, and are eventually forced to participate in, these social rituals and conventions."[640] and "the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of locating agency within the complex neurological machinations that lie behind action, where body, affect, and cognition play their respective roles."[641] While Auestad emphasizes how this dynamic plays out amongst Soseki's human characters and

[638] Frederic Jameson, "Soseki and Western Modernism," 130
[639] Jameson, "Soseki and Western Modernism," 131
[640] Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 235-236
[641] Auestad, "The Affect that Disorients *Kokoro*," 47

institutions, Jameson discusses "the obligatory presence of the object world in the novel,"[642] which he compares with "the aesthetics of Woolf" in that "it is the absence of the object-world that attracts attention"[643] by which he means the novel's subtle observance of the residual impression of the object-world on its human characters.

In both Jameson's and Auestad's readings, the dimensions of Soseki which appear cute-*kawaii* to me, appear alongside a utopian vision or an ethical possibility. For Jameson, Soseki's text "seems to offer the utopian de-materialization and stylization of the outside world...But it does this by including passion, need, social class, and money rather than by leaving them out. Eerily resembling the cute-*kawaii*, it does so "by translating all those things into its own idiom-the interpersonal language exchange."[644] Auestad suggests Soseki's novels' depiction of "contingent and the free nature of affect and the malleability of human motivation"[645] might proffer "an opportunity to rethink the terms of ethical relationality, for which the first step might be to acknowledge our own limited self-knowledge."[646] To translate these arguments into my own idiom, I might describe Jameson's characterization of the novel as corresponding with the cute-*kawaii* conceived of as both innocent and acute, while Auestad's evokes the cute-*kawaii*'s profligate protean nature. In either case, what appears in these writers as cute-*kawaii* appears attendant upon questions of affect, ethics, and human being.

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[642] Jameson, "Soseki and Western Modernism," 127-128
[643] Jameson, "Soseki and Western Modernism," 127-128
[644] Jameson, "Soseki and Western Modernism," 127-128
[645] Reiko Abe Auestad, "The Affect that Disorients *Kokoro*," 56
[646] Reiko Abe Auestad, "The Affect that Disorients *Kokoro*," 56

Imperialism and Mis-Anthropomorphism

In Woolf, the critiques of cute-*kawaii*'s "imperialistic" anthropomorphism, as well as disempowering affect are nearly literalized. Shell-shocked, pitiable Septimus Smith is interrupted in the process of verbalizing his message of universal love by "a Skye terrier snuffing his trousers" perceives it transform into a man and, "starting in agony and fear" declare "it was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man!" Later, he internally rebuts his wife Rezia's optimism by comparing men with dogs, claiming "that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs." A contradiction is introduced. To hunt in a pack requires, to a degree, suppression of an individual's pleasure, and faith in the collective good faith. Anthropomorphizing the dog, and animalizing people, for Septimus, are the same form of brutalization. A more ambivalent cute-*kawaii* anthropomorphism-animalization concerns Clarissa and Richard Dalloway. Recounting an incident "when that great shaggy dog of Clarissa's got caught in a trap and had its paw half torn off," Peter Walsh recalls Richard telling Clarissa "not to be a fool" and instructing her to "Hold this—fetch that." Appearing to patronize Clarissa, Richard speaks to her like a dog "all the time talking to the dog as if it were a human being." Peter compares Dalloway's anthropomorphism of the dog with his tendency to regard the speaker of Shakespeare's sonnets as Shakespeare himself, and therefore to regard reading the sonnets as "listening at keyholes." Freighted with assumptions about speech, silence, power, and subjecthood Peter links the capacity to treat animals as if they were people with the capacity to treat people as people—as well as the capacity to treat people as

animals.

However, the most violent instances of anthropomorphism in Woolf, and the most imperialistic, concern the attempts to treat people *as* people; specifically, to regard people as modernity's atomized, mechanized, and instrumentalized subject. This model is reinforced through the ideologically overdetermined discursive practices of the psychiatrists, Drs. Bradshaw, and Holmes. In his encounters with the doctors Septimus perceives them as the representatives of an abstract and universalized "human nature," that despite its pretension to a "civilizing" mission—a reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—is at root a "repulsive brute, with blood-red nostrils." When you "stumble," Septimus writes on a postcard, "human nature is on you. Holmes is on you"; he exclaims "You brute! You brute!" upon "seeing human nature, that is Dr. Holmes, enter the room." That the deictic "that" refers both to Dr. Holmes and "human nature" already puts exterior and interior realities into play in the process of appearing *as* a human subject. His association with both "homes" and "rooms" as spaces which speak to not only human dwelling but a particular kind of human dwelling, wherein dwell particular kinds of human subject. Punning the interiority of "home" as a material space, "Holmes" also refers to the mass cultural master of deductive reasoning, Sherlock Holmes. He is thus associated with both a particularly English and Western model of the psychological interior of the human as well as a particularly English and Western belief in the capacity of the intellect to empirically know its objects, not merely in perception but according to the universal laws of mathematics and mechanics.

When we become privy to Sir William Bradshaw's conception of himself and his

work, the disjunction between being and appearing as human is made explicit, Woolf discloses an instability between Bradshaw's categorical understanding of human beings as a certain kind of productive, heterosexual British subject, and the phenomenological experience of what appears as human. This instability takes the form of an undecidability between interior/exterior and subject/object as what are assumed to exclude each other come to resemble each other. It is mediated by an uncanny discourse that juxtaposes "Enlightenment knowledge and ancient lore."[647] Bradshaw claims to possess both an "almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis" as well as "sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul."[648] Remembering that Freud suggests that "the immortal" soul was the first "double" of the body," and this primeval "invention of doubling" serves "as preservation against extinction" of the ego, Bradshaw's self-assurance directly rests his scientific certainty on the invocation of "the soul" in this manner.[649] That is, Bradshaw invokes the immaterial and irrational in order to secure his rationalized understanding of the material.

The contradiction between being possessed of a "human soul" and being an embodied human being is illustrated further in Bradshaw's rationalization regarding Septimus's suicide, in which the question of its meaning *for Septimus* is not a question of his being subject or object, but of Bradshaw's subjectification of an objectified "human nature." From ""the first moment the Warrens Smiths came into the room" Bradshaw is "certain he directly saw" Septimus, and is able to ascertain "in two or three minutes," on the basis of both his "thirty years' experience of these kinds of cases, and his infallible

[647] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 78
[648] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*,
[649] Freud, "The Uncanny," 9

instinct," that is another instance of "complete physical and nervous breakdown." Upon Septimus's suicide Bradshaw confers total inscrutability to "what, after all, we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain." In either case, soul or substance, Bradshaw delegates Septimus to the status of object. This is suggested by the substitution of "nervous system" for "soul" when describing the immaterial capacities of the human in the context of diagnosis, a substitution that is simultaneously a repression and a disclosure of the recursive doubling of body and mind. Bradshaw can apprehend that something that cannot be directly experienced by him is at work in Septimus, but his rationalist insistence on the empirical and material refuses to admit to the possibility of his *not knowing* what being human entails. The "after all" that qualifies his concession to his lack of knowledge, nonetheless affirms the objectified interior organ "brain" as the locus of human meaning.

But Septimus is not merely objectified as a disembodied brain. He is taken by Bradshaw to be merely another instance of "these kinds of cases," the repetition of a symptomatology, a model of what is recognized as a human dysfunction. Diagnosis appears here as a reproduction of a human form which delimits human possibility, and undermines Septimus' attempt to communicate by excluding his "message" from rational discourse. The prosopoetic silencing of the doctor's diagnosis is reflected and compounded by the prescribed cure. In "these kinds of cases," when his patients "threaten, as they often do, to kill themselves," Bradshaw orders "silence and rest...without friends, without books, without messages." That Bradshaw deals exclusively with his patients as material objects subject to rational laws is further

emphasized by the observation that as a consequence of all that rest "a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve." Thingified, those presumed to be suicidal are deprived of agency and increased in mass. However, before he defenestrates himself Septimus insists that "he did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot." His suicide is a repudiation of Bradshaw's diagnosis and methods, and the imperialist "human-nature" Bradshaw represents, that takes the form of the playful, subversive mimicry of Luce Irigaray. In reproducing Bradshaw's flawed image of him, Septimus asserts his agency against the objectifying discourse of Bradshaw's diagnosis.

Inasmuch as the reasons for his suicide are presented to the reader beyond the implied trauma of WWI, it is in the form of a plaintive question: "Only human beings—what did they want?" 'Human being' here is ambiguous and overdetermined. It resembles Bradshaw's imperialist brute "human nature," the quantitative masses of rationally delimited human beings in general. However, to be a "being" and not a "nature" is to be conferred not merely an incipient agency, a will, but the active persistence of something extant in the world apart from and among other things. It is also the particular human being that Septimus is, whose queer "want" for his commanding officer, and his grief regarding the same, is rendered inarticulable. Septimus's "human being" is therefore the converse of Bradshaw's "human nature." While both "being" and "nature" describe something taken to be an object (of discourse, of use) "being" does not presume the thing's knowability as the mute object of rationalist modernity. It merely signals *that* that exists—it is somehow itself. "Human being" as signified by Septimus, is affective and experiential, the uncanny double of the materialist "human nature." While Bradshaw and

Holmes assume they can see "clear" and "direct" Septimus wonders "Why could he see through bodies," and "see into the future, when dogs will become men?"

Septimus' experience of "Extrasensory perception compromises…[a] masculine sense of self-determination,"[650] and positions him as the pliant object of circumstances. As it concerns "precognition, deja vu," and "incursions from the past and future"[651] our experience and conception of the uncanny fundamentally "[subverts] the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic."[652] It is this which makes it a threat to the objectifying rationalism whose understanding of human nature affords the capitalist-colonialist projects of post-Enlightenment, post-industrial societies the pretension to "civilizing" missions. This is because "the rationalist attitude...inevitably depends on this primal internalization of the spectral" in order to both assert and naturalize a foundational hierarchy of subject and object. A subject's susceptibility to the influence of outside forces, whether they appear as ghost, gods, or animals undermines reason's "creative claim on the world" and "renders it unable to assert...its autonomy."[653] The mind's susceptibility to, and therefore implicit integration in, the embodied world is also its susceptibility to its ethical responsibility for the other. As Terry Castle writes in her history of the uncanny: "To be 'haunted'...is to display one's powers of sympathetic imagination; the cruel and the dull have no such hallucinations."[654] This historical circumstance is reproduced in Bradshaw's silencing of Septimus admittedly naive, poorly

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[650] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 68
[651] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 4-5
[652] Ibid.
[653] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 143
[654] Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 123

articulated message of "Love, trees, there is no crime," and,—Septimus says interrupting his monologue, recalling the Derridean-Joycean 'Yes" which signals the interruption of the self by the call of the other—"What was his message?"

The repression of the spectral here speaks to the link between the ethical, the religious, and the mimetic which appears in the tropes of the cute-*kawaii*. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the contrast between "being" and "nature," and the relationship between mimesis and ethics are illustrated through the contrast between Bradshaw's quasi-religious devotion to the goddesses "proportion" and "conversion" and his patients' 'delusion' of being Christ, which he notes is "a common delusion." His assessment of his patients' sanity rests on the assumption that imitation entails identity, and on the basis of the rational principle of noncontradiction assumes that if a patient insists they are "christ" have irrationally identified themselves with what they are not. Bradshaw's insistence on the impossibility of their being Christ furthermore assumes 'Christ' itself describes a discrete identity, exclusive to its object. "Christ" is, as mentioned elsewhere, not a name, but a title. It describes not the person of the messiah but perhaps the practice of messianism. Bradshaw thus cannot recognize the possibility of some other person being "a Christ"—of the Christ appearing as the meek, the mad, or the least of these. Furthermore, Bradshaw fails to recognize the position of "Christ" as an ethical ideal, explicitly to be emulated by human Christians, and for that purpose explicitly sharing in the form of human being. In spite of this, Bradshaw's ethos of "health" is also a religious ethos of mimesis. In keeping with his rationalist conception of "human nature, " Sir William's worships "Proportion, divine proportion" whose ethical imperative is formally

precise, and definitionally exclusive.

Thus, with the invocation of Proportion Dr. Bradshaw "secluded England's lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion…if they were men, Lady Bradshaw's if they were women." The imposition of a normative human nature in England's domestic sphere is doubled in the activity of Proportion's sister goddess Conversion, who "in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London…is engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance," whereafter she "feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace." The substitution of the specter of Christ for the specter of Proportion suggests not just that Bradshaw has substituted his own unselfconscious irrationalism for Septimus's, but that mimesis does not entail identification but entanglement. Bradshaw apprehends, but does not identify, the parallels between his work on the mind and the colonial project, and imagines a sympathetic relationship between himself and the nation such that when Bradshaw "prospered," he "made England prosper." Disputing the reality of any possible identification with Christ, Bradshaw irrationally identifies with England. Significantly, Bradshaw's imagined, irrational sharing in the identity of England, is not *wrong*, but unscientific. He intuits but does not observe the resemblance between himself and the nation—the manner in which he is a reproduction of unseen circumstances. Notably, Conversion must first "set up" her "countenance" in place of other divinities, before she can "adore her own features stamped on the face of the populace."

Distinctions between subject and object, real and virtual, person or thing do not accommodate the ways in which these come to mirror each other.

Echoes and imitations of Bradshaw's imperialist anthropomorphism appear in Soseki's *Sanshiro*. The novel follows the titular university student, a guileless country boy, as he navigates the cultural and urban landscapes of modern Tokyo. In the opening chapter, Sanshiro encounters a stranger on the train to Tokyo who is, unbeknownst to him, his future professor of English literature. Questions of identity, humanity, and westernization are prompted almost immediately through Sanshiro's aesthetic reflection on "foreigners" so "colorful and attractive" that they "seem to be of a higher class," and prompt the "entranced" Sanshiro "to imagine himself traveling to the West, and feeling insignificant among them."[655] Observing Sanjiro's rapture, his future teacher comments, ""We Japanese are sad-looking things next to them. We can beat the Russians, we can become a first-class power, but it doesn't make any difference." Already we are presented with Karatani's psychologized face, however here it is not merely the mark of a subject, but a specifically national, ethnic, *and* global subject. It is "sad-looking" not merely because it appears to outwardly express an interior feeling, but because it is "next to" the foreign—and because it appears adjacent to the foreign it appears "Japanese." Because it "makes no difference" that Japan has defeated Russia there is an implicit concession to a determinant notion of identity as knowable, stable and consistent. Professor Hirota elaborates, "We still have the same faces...Just look at the houses we live in, the gardens

[655] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 15

we build around them. They're just what you expect from faces like this."[656] An articulation of the logic implicit in the condensation of "homes," and their interior, with the detective "Holmes" and the interior of the mind, in the figure of Holmes the psychologist, Hirota delimits particular modes of being to particular modes of appearing-as on the basis of a hastily generalized resemblance: "faces like these."

Sanshiro's response to Hirota further evinces a tension between *knowing* and *wondering* about human beings, in the particular context of their racialization. Sanshiro claims that he "had never expected to meet anyone like this after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war," going so far as to say "the man was almost not Japanese, he felt."[657] The implication is that amidst Japan's increasingly militaristic and nationalistic culture at the turn of the century, Sanshiro cannot countenance Hirota's criticism. However, the possibility of a Japanese nationalism and a Japanese national subject is a consequence of modernity's violent injunction into Tokyo Bay earlier in the century. Sanshiro's sense of himself as a citizen of the Japanese nation, although it is superficially opposed to Hirota's national self-deprecation, is merely the mirror image of its essentializing rationality. The dynamic repeats itself in Hirota's rejoinder to Sanshiro's patriotism, which posits the infinite interior of the subject as an alternative to the totalizing discourse of nationalism: "Even bigger than Japan is the inside of your head. Don't ever surrender yourself—Not to Japan."[658] Hirota does not appear to register that a surrender has already occurred, and has been repeated in his invocation of an interior: the

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[656] Ibid.
[657] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 16
[658] Ibid.

submission to the Enlightenment conception of the human subject. Questions of national identity and globalization explicitly intersect here with questions of anthropomorphism and the human.

Insisting Sanshiro gaze at Mt. Fuji as the train passes, Hirota explains: "It's the finest thing we have to offer, the only thing we have to boast about. The trouble is…it's just a natural object. We didn't make it."[659] This characterization of Mt. Fuji is in stark contrast to religious and cultural significance afforded to the mountain prior to *Meiji*. Conceived of as a *kami* in its own right, the mountain also housed numerous Shinto temples, and was believed to be where *Amaterasu-hime*, goddess of the sun and ancestor of the Japanese royal family, hid herself in a cave until she could be lured out by the image of her face in a mirror. Not only does the absorption of the spirit of the mountain into the image of the nation render it a tourist destination, but the reproduces a post-enlightenment subject/object hierarchy and the corollary hierarchy of art/nature wherein the natural world is the object of the human subject's ingenuity. The conversion is not complete however. Later in the novel Hirota asks Sanshiro, "Have you ever tried to translate Mt. Fuji?" It's "fun" Hirota insists because "whenever you translate nature it turns into something human'" Notably to be "something human" is not necessarily to be *human*, in the same way a translation does not simply reproduce its original text. Earlier articulating, albeit disheartedly, an Enlightenment hierarchy within the context of Japan's geopolitical position, here Hirota implicitly rejects an Enlightenment conception of identity.

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[659] Ibid.

Rather than merely the object known and used by the subject, nature in Hirota's understanding, "always gives you a word having to do with character...'Noble,' say or 'great,' or 'heroic."[660] In other words, it is possible for nature to act upon humans, to endow humans with a "character," that is not an identity but a set of shifting, seemingly related terms. Moreover, the translatability of nature signals the possibility of both being mute, and being communicative. Significantly, in English, a "character" is at once a person and its representation in the form of a thing—either through writing, or its image, and t he invocation of the mute communicability of writing here resists the objectification and instrumentalization of natural things (including persons) within an Enlightenment framework of knowability. It resists, but does not overcome. Hirota's belief that "nature can't influence the character of someone who can't translate nature into character," once again positions the human above the natural, and makes nature's power to influence the human contingent upon the human agent's mastery of language. A later incident further undermines this supposition, calling into question these categories and their assumed relations and suggesting an ethical import to the interrelated appearances of the human, the artificial, the natural, and the national.

Sanshiro is invited to see a display of Chrysanthemum dolls, or *kiku-ningyo* at Dangozaka, where the practice had been a part of autumn *yanaka kiku* festivals going back to the *Edo* period. The dolls are both opposed to modernity and the west, and their sign. Sanshiro's friend Yojiro opines he'd "rather go to the moving pictures," than to see the dolls, but Professor Hirota believes they are a "fine thing" specifically because there

[660] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 57

isn't "anything so artificial in any other country. Hirota places value on the dolls as a signifier of national identity, and specifically as objects elevated to the status of art, and subordinated to human interests. He declares, "No one would go…to see them…if the dolls looked like ordinary people."[661] In doing so, he affirms their status as "objects" within the framework of modernity, but moreover implicates them in the imperial project of global capital, gesturing to the fulmination of Hello Kitty and other cute-*kawaii* characters later in the century. The subsumption of the dolls religious function to a capitalist law of exchange is a piece with the subsumption of affective to commodity cute-*kawaii*, in which the anarchic pro-sociality of the cute-*kawaii* becomes 'stuck' to particular modes of appearing as cute-*kawaii*. This, Soseki's novel suggests, has ethical implications. As they approach the dolls Sanshiro and his companions have two uncanny encounters with the forces of modern global capitalism. In each, the quality of being human is disassociated from actual human beings, who are in turn made to appear as mute, malformed, and ghostly objects.

It is an instance of what Melba Cuddy-Keane describes as "runaway globalization," the proliferation of divergent values systems weakens traditional conceptions of responsibility, the group discovers both a beggar and a lost child, observe how sympathetic they are, lament no one will stop to help, and decide themselves not to stop to help. As they pass Sanshiro wonders that "the little girl attracted the attention and sympathy of everyone around her, but still she had to keep on crying loudly in search of

[661] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 82

her grandmother. It was a strange phenomenon."[662] The derealization of the girl's suffering is placed in explicitly aesthetic terms by Sanshiro's companions, who criticize both the girl and the beggar for failing to stage themselves in the appropriate way to solicit help: "He's in the wrong place....If they came across him on a deserted mountain top, everyone would feel like giving him something." When this reasoning meets resistance, figures of modernity are invoked by Hirota as an alternative explanation: "Everyone figures a policeman is bound to take care of her...so they avoid responsibility." Unarticulated is the possibility that the institutions of modernity and the appearance of an other which compels human response-ability are entangled, and the appearance of the human is conditioned and contingent. The Enlightenment objectification of human being which obtains in the division of labor that "avoids responsibility" is highlighted in contrast between the unheard girl, and the sound of capitalism which mimics the human voice. Their ethical quandaries abandoned, Sanshiro finds himself enchanted and disconcerted by the "ticket takers' cries" which are "So utterly remote from normal voices" that Sanshiro can only assume, "Those are no human sounds. They're the voices of the chrysanthemum dolls."[663]

The Faces in Mirrors

In contrast to the anthropomorphic discourses of Enlightenment modernity, which determines identity on the basis of shared form, the prosopopoetic in Woolf and Soseki presents a more ambiguous relationship between appearing-as and being-human. In two

[662] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 92-93
[663] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 92-93

encounters with what appears as a human face, the coherent, autonomous, Enlightenment subject is shown to be intimately and unavoidably entangled with the nonhuman world. In each, Woolf and Soseki's protagonists momentarily suffer a lapse in Enlightenment being affected by a face in a mirror. Rather than reinforcing the association of the human subject with the speaking human face, the experience begins to unravel oppositions between speaking and silence, thing and human, knowing and unknowing. Mirrors appear cute-*kawaii* in a most literal sense: the mute face of an intimate human other, whose thoughts we appear to know. Moreover, in the 20th century mirrors occupy a particular position with regards to the historical transformation of the wondrous to the uncanny. Regarded with suspicion and awe prior to the Enlightenment, the commodification and mass production of mirrors in the 20th century signifies the double subordination of object to subject, and subject to a rationalized law of exchange—and in the mirrors Woolf and Soseki the spectral dimensions thereby repressed return.

To illustrate the enmeshment of the Enlightenment subject, the human face, I quote biologist Terry Landau from his evolutionary history of the face: 'We experience identity as a diffuse feeling which is interwoven with all other feelings and which is hard, if not impossible, to describe—that is, until we look in the mirror. And then identity is suddenly personified. It is the face you see reflected. It is you."[664] This assertion follows, Barbara Johnson notes, "after describing a baby's eyes as being disproportionately large to inspire a caring response" establishing a parallel between the model of cute-*kawaii*

[664] Landau, qtd. Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 31

affect rooted in biological form, and the rationalized face.[665] Clarissa Dalloway, at her toilette before her party, contradicts these assertions:

"…collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self—pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point…[666]

As scholars have previously noted, Clarissa's identity, in stark contrast to the rational, autonomous, individual of the Enlightenment and the Victorian novel, is thoroughly modernist in its fragmentation. This passage dramatizes, for Shannon Forbes, "a Clarissa who is split, but who desperately desires to possess a Victorian, stable, unified self," even as she recognizes "the near impossibility" of that eventuality.[667] The naturalization Landau attempts to give the face-as-self is unmasked as a mask, as Clarissa can only recognize herself with "some effort," and even then "the contraction" of that effort

[665] Ibid.
[666] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 26-27
[667] Shannon Forbes, "Equating Performance and Identity: The Failure of Clarissa Dalloway's Victorian Self," 40

remains "imperceptible" to her. It is only by "Merging with the city environment," that Clarissa can "achieve some semblance of unity and stability."[668] This is not only because the city environment prosthetically "functions as a substitute for the unified, stable self she lacks," but because within the city Clarissa "is an insider and worthy of respect."[669] Elaborating on Forbes's argument, Clarissa's sense that she belongs with London society is predicated on the social mirroring of the signs of that belonging, but these are not effectively different from the face in the mirror—each is an object that acts upon and enacts subjectivity in such a way as to constitute the multitude of diffusive English selves.

The instability of Clarissa's identity highlights that, as Johnson writes, "our identity lies in what is *seen*, not in seeing...Identity is an object...without which there would be no subject."[670] Clarissa is able to encounter herself in her face only through the assistance of things, and the self-perception Landau implies is natural to us comes about only if mediated through a mirror. Thus, the perception of her face in a glass does not cause Clarissa's identity to cohere: it recapitulates its diffusion through the multitude of others it requires to achieve subject-hood, including others that are objects. While the "effort" required to "give her face point" is conceivably personal, it is grammatically impersonal, as is "some call on her to be herself." While "point" references a physical contortion of the face, it also suggests both "point" as the meaning of something, and "to point" as an indexical gesture. It indexes a meaning, in this case, that is responsive to the

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[668]Forbes, "," 41
[669]Ibid.
[670] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 181

call or external effort of its own indexical function. The "imperceptible" contraction undergone by her face with regard to its reflection, "how many million times," suggests that this response is autonomous, and that the encounter with the looking glass is not in every way distinct from encountering another person. Clarissa believes her "only gift" is "knowing people almost by instinct...put her in a room with someone, up went her back like a cat's; or she purred."[671] Encountering "itself" in the mirror, her face points, and Clarissa's body responds as if to another person in the room. Inverting "the chain of *prosopopoeia*" de Man describes as inevitably pulling the object into the appearance of subjectivity, here it is the object that causes Clarissa to appear as subject, and which tugs at the chain of interrelated beings that cause her to be a social-political subject, mirror included.

In keeping with an expansive cute-kawaii anthropomorphism I resist the suggestion made by Harvena Richter that, in Woolf's novels, "reflected and reflector merge," and "People, objects, landscapes...all the world...becomes a series of mirrors reflecting...the most truthful expression of [persons] themselves."[672] My view aligns more closely with Douglas Mao's understanding of Woolfian objects as "securing the link between a crisis of significance and the brute facticity of the object world,"[673] which is accomplished "not by anthropomorphizing the object world (a gesture that could be dismissed as a purely sentimental imagining of injustice against that which does not

[671]Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 9
[672]Richter, *Woolf: The Inward Journey*, 99-100
[673]Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects*, 48

suffer), but rather by linking that world to the human figure."[674] However, in as much as Woolf appears opposed to a vulgar anthropomorphism, she does not appear to object to an "anthropomorphic element in perception" which might imagine the suffering of objects. Nor does the relationship between humans and things that appear in Woolf's novels exclusively involve the domination of the object world by an imperialistic subjectivity."[675] Instead, things in Woolf (and Soseki's) novel occupy a more uncanny position, and present a complex interplay between human being and being a thing. Woolf's mirror, given face, reflects upon the idea of faces *as* mirrors, mirrors as agents, and both mirrors and faces as things that enact a style of humanity that is non-identical with a human subject.

Clarissa's face, I've already noted, appears to "point" (to) itself such that it seems to autonomously regard itself as another. It also comes to bear formal and historical signifiers of the cute-*kawaii*. "Collecting "herself from elsewhere as collectors gather bibleots, Clarissa's mirrored face is described as "pink" and "delicate," belonging to "the woman" she sees. The Bloomsbury group, to which Woolf belonged, and Wyndham Lewis critiqued "as part of the cult of youth that he detested," often projected "the Victorian childhood onto a modern adulthood," as a mode of "discreet subversion that takes the nineteenth century at its word (to children) while deploying that word against it."[676] As Douglas Mao observes, a standard piece of Victorian advice on child-rearing

[674] Ibid.
[675] Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects*, 52
[676] Mao, "Solid Objects," 28

was to make one's child a collector."[677] 'Collecting' also links the face in the mirror with the *fort-da* game of Freud's grandson, in which the child negotiates the disappearance of its mother (perceived as an extension of itself) by causing other things to appear or disappear. In one instance related in a footnote the child plays using the appearance and disappearance of his reflection.[678] Woolf's novel thus returns us to a scene of childhood emotional development in which mimesis is both the mode and, in the mirror, the medium. Freud reads this as a process of subjectification aimed at "mastery, with the child vengefully restaging the mother's disappearance from the point of view of an agent. However, it has been characterized by later theorists along the lines of entrainment, as an "exploratory repetition," in which the child assumes "the role of the mother" in order to "explore possibilities of power, control, tenderness, and responsibility."[679] In either case, the "serious play" of *fort-da* appears, as Derrida argues, to "couple" presence and absence, relating them in the form of repetition or "returning" in which[680] Mimesis is a supplement, a resemblance, an-other rather than an assimilation or identity.

Although she published Freud, Woolf's presentation of Clarissa's *fort-da* better recollects Derrida's interpretation of the game as involving "a collection, the set of toys, the unity of multiplicity that can be scattered," and reassembled, n which the child "himself is also a collection whose reassemblage can yield an entire combinatorial of sets,"[681] and it is the child itself, or "his image that the child plays at making appear-

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[677] Ibid.
[678] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,
[679] Jay Watson, "Guys and Dolls: Exploratory Repetition and Maternal Subjectivity," 476
[680] Derrida, "To Speculate—On Freud," 248
[681] Derrida, "To Speculate—On Freud," 240

disappear" through his interactions with things. It is not a woman, Clarissa identifies, a being belonging to the category of women, which in the novel's free indirect discourse might imply a rational, unified, agentic, categorizing "I." She registers *first* the form of that being called woman appearing in the mirror, the image of a woman that is *the mirror itself*—the literal mirror through which and at which Clarissa thinks "herself." The effect is very briefly uncanny, an encounter with something at once spectral, and cyborgian—a mad gynoid in the attic. The definite article of "the woman" aligns Clarissa's perception of her reflection with the narrowing of attention in perceptions of cute-kawaii, as well as echoes the categorical confusion of child speech in that it applies the definite article to make an object more indefinite. The series of ever briefer clauses by which Clarissa comes to identify "The woman" with the "pink delicate face," as "herself" mirrors what Massumi describes as the "subtractive" function of consciousness by which the bodily impingement of affect is reflected in the intellect as an idea or emotion: "Mind and body are...two levels recapitulating the same image/expression event in different but parallel ways...from the concrete to the incorporeal, holding to the same absent center of a now spectral—and potentialized—encounter."[682] In Clarissa's case the idea of herself is necessarily abstracted from the "actual action" of looking in the mirror, in the "actual context" of the mirror's material presence in which "she alone" knows herself. Thus her private reflections proceed from the sensible impingement of the pink face to the idea of herself as "One" woman, whose face is nonetheless "drawn" together from a register of "incompatible" parts.

[682] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 93

The repetition of “drew” and “drawing” in the passage function as what Massumi calls the “autonomic repetition and variation of the impingement” in which an idea retains some underlying potential of the encounter it obfuscates. The verb ‘to draw’ compresses a variety of meanings that, together, recapitulate the movement from encounter to idea. It is at once to produce an artistic representation, to reach a logical conclusion, to exert force by pulling, to attract or entice as if by magnet or magic, to drain or empty of fluid as when drawing blood, and to disembowel as when one is “drawn and quartered.” Significantly, these auratic meanings, subtracted from the grammatical content of the text, figure both/and/or/n/either Clarissa and/n/or the mirror as agent—Clarissa enraptured, exerts, and infers; the mirror, disemboweled from the earth, reflects, represents or is made to represent mimetic representation. “Draw” also draws us back to the mirror by way of the “drawing-room.” An apheresis of the older “withdrawing room” the term signifies both the space wherein her guests will later gather, (‘drawing’ Clarissa out of her pensive solitude, or forcing the ‘withdrawal’ of “how different incompatible’ — the ‘drawing-room’ being also a highly gendered-space), the apportioned gathering and to the actual space to which Clarissa withdraws in order to reflect, the space before the mirror that is a “drawing-room” by virtue of being where Clarissa “draws” herself. Envisioning “herself” as a “meeting-point” for her guests is underlain, then, by the mirror as a “meeting-point” that gives rise to self-reflection. That the proper name “Clarissa Dalloway” occupies the intermediate position between encounter with the image of the body and the idea of herself as such furthermore suggests that the humans who so call her are, in effect, other mirrors actively contributing to the production of a particular form of

self-identity. The rooms, Clarissa, the mirror, and the face in the mirror, then, like each other and like a cute-kawaii object, appear always and insistently in the context of relating, and Clarissa's identity is consequently diffuse because it is distributed amongst the objects that relate it.

Here, what is relayed is not merely the object identity of identity as such, but identity as an object facilitated by objects—a subject that shares its being with objects, not as an essence but as shared activity, what John-Luc Nancy would describe as a "co-appearing."[683] The reflexive responsiveness of Clarissa's face in the mirror discloses both modes of being reflective and modes of being reflected that do not exist independently of each other's appearing to be like the other. The mirror is not passive, but exhibits the agency of what Jane Bennett refers to as "vibrant matter"—a capacity for things to be "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others," rather than passive receptacles of human will. The uncanny cute-kawaii of Clarissa's face as it is reflected by the mirror indexes not merely the artifice of the identity constructed on the basis of that reflection, but the shrewdness of the mirror that enables it according to an active quality of its materiality, or what Bennett terms "thing power": "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our experience."[684] What is suggested by Clarissa's encounter with the mirror is that our interiority is in some sense 'outside of our experience,' as it is constituted in relation with things. This is consistent with Simon

[683] *Being Singular Plural*,
[684] Bennett, *Vibral Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, *xvi*

May's view that the cute-*kawaii* "has nothing to do with showing 'inwardness' whether...it is conceived as stable or as changing."[685] The cute-*kawaii* mirror and the cute-*kawaii* face are not opposed but engaged with each other in the production of a particular form of the human, which suppresses the engagement of the exterior thing in the construction of the subject's interior. + (Fisher 12)

Thing power is constituted not solely according to the materiality of individual things, but their interaction with material-cultural circumstances that are "themselves powerful material assemblages."[686] To paraphrase from Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, we arrive at things already embedded within histories and trajectories, burdened with human meanings that are palpable things in their own way. Mirrors, as objects, arrive at Clarissa's bathroom after having been for centuries overdetermined by human meaning—enchanted objects that signify both as a natural wonder, and a marker of class position—aristocratic in the 18th century, bourgeois in the 19th and 20th centuries . Sabine Melchior-Bonnet's *The Mirror: A History* connects these actants to a variety of qualities that appear innately human, but in my reading of Clarissa's encounter I want to emphasize one effect material mirrors have on human self-conception in relation to others. Mirrors are generally minute in scope, originally due to the preciousness of the materials they were made from, and later on due to the technical difficulties of mirror production. Accordingly, personal mirrors have often been able to reflect only the individual mirror-gazer, and are thus formally aligned with the subject as

[685] May, *The Power of Cute*, 176
[686] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 1

self-contained identity. Mirrors, however, not only isolate individuals within the frame of their reflection, they also, according to Melchior-Bonnet, substitute for human others. "How did one live with a face or clothe a body," she asks, "that, without the aid of a mirror, one knew only through the gaze of others?"[687][688] In light of this observation, the "oneness" of the woman and the diamond that Clarissa 'is,' is doubly significant. Narrowing Clarissa's attention to the plasticity of being that is herself, the mirror also actively impresses upon Clarissa the illusion of being an individual subject; or, rather the illusion of the subject as an individual thing.

As a singular diamond, Clarissa's self assumes the sparkling qualities of the mirror that bears it, but in becoming like the self she sees, Clarissa becomes susceptible to seeing herself *as* the self she sees rather than the self that sees. In spite of disembodied rationality's pretension to objective knowledge (or to know its object), "a self-image can suffer all the distortions to which any *image* is susceptible," not because it is the expression of a subject's interior but because the self "can be known only as an object, and not as a subject."[689] Echoing and inverting Clarissa Dalloway, Barbara Johnson suggests "a subject can only cry out, 'I am that!'—which does not at all imply that the subject can *be* that."[690] However, Clarissa's misrecognition of her 'self' in the mirror is the corollary of another. The refrain of her promenade through the city streets— "I am not this, I am not that"— is like the self she identifies in the mirror subtractive of her

[687] Melchior-Bennett, *The Mirror: A History*, 2
[688] Benjamin Goldberg, *The Mirror and Man,*
[689] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 49
[690] Ibid.

being as an affective relation with the things she sees. Perceiving her humanity from within the confines of the bathroom mirror of her middle-class home, Clarissa is caused to consider herself as private individual, a subject that stands independent of other forms of humanity, and that then must make sense of other forms of human being from within the point of view of the bourgeois mirror. Thus, when Woolf describes her heroine as distastefully "tinselly," and A.D. Moody critiques her as the "animated mirror" of her social class, the descriptors are more than metaphorical—they index an identity in material relation to its circumstances. Clarissa's "truest expression" of herself is not present to her reflection because the mode of reflection as disclosure of self is constructed through the cultural embeddedness of the mirror's vibrant materiality.

The mimetic interplay between non-human things and the human is presented in a similar encounter at the end of Soseki's unfinished final novel, *Meian* (1916), extending the reasoning of Woolf's. Beset by illness, the main character Tsuda spends the bulk of the novel enmeshed in a family drama: resentful of his wife, belittled by his brother and sister-in-law, and distant from his father. Like *Mrs. Dalloway,* Soseki's novel takes the form of successive character studies which pivot on feelings of wonder in its interrogative mode. However, while Woolf's use of free-indirect discourse blurs the lines between its characters, as well as between characters and narrator, Soseki's language insists upon their difference even as it presents the possibilities of being open to the other. Each character involved in the novel's drama becomes a subject of observation, without becoming an object of knowledge as the narrator wonders about but does not affirm their interior. Hyper-attentive to mien, characters in *Meian* observe the fleeting affects upon

other faces and with limited understanding of each other's circumstances, theorize about each other's motivations and intentions. In its uncanny (and unintended) finale, Tsuda travels to a bathhouse in the country where he has a chance encounter with a former paramour, Kiyoko, and the text undergoes a shift in register. Without dissolving, subjects and objects as they appear in post-Enlightenment global modernity waver. What was previously a fairly realist recording of exterior occurrences, attains a kind of Gothic intensity without transitioning to an entirely subjective or interior mode.

If Clarissa's experience of herself is fundamentally mediated and formed by things, Tsuda's experience is of the *thingness of experience*, the materiality of fantasy, and the bodily squishiness of being a human thing amongst other things, including other persons. In Soseki's novel, the uncanny effect of the mirror and the person is more acute, in part because the thingness of things is more pronounced. Whereas Clarissa's mirror imbibes some of her vibrancy, the mirror in which Tsuda discovers his image reflects a human's glassy gaze:

"He looked away from the water and encountered abruptly the figure of another person. Startled, he narrowed his gaze and peered. But it was only an image of himself, reflected in a mirror hanging alongside the sinks. It wasn't full length, but it was large, at least as long as the mirrors in a barber shop. It was also, like a barber's mirror, due to the space it occupied, perpendicular: not only his head but his shoulders and trunk and hips as well were reflected back at him in the same plane as he was standing. Even after he had recognized that he was facing an image of himself, he was unable to avert his eyes...

Before he had determined that the image was himself, he was assailed by the feeling that he was looking at his own ghost. Horrified, he resisted. He widened his eyes and studied the reflection even more closely."[691]

Soseki's Tsuda, like Clarissa, appears in a scene in which an adult reprises the child's game of *fort-da*. However, while Clarissa "collects" herself in the mirror, the mirror in *Meian* participates in the disassembling portion of the game. Like the cute-*kawaii*, this mirror cuts. It dislocates space, and separates the pieces of Tsuda's body. A barber's mirror, it is a thing out of place in the country *onsen* Tsuda finds himself, and associated with the abjection of human hair which is ambiguously in/animate, and in/human, and disciplines by means of scissors or blades. Like a blade, it dismembers. It carves off Tsuda's "head," "shoulders," "trunk," and "hips" from his legs and genitals, the lower bodily strata Bakhtin associates with the grotesque. In its material dimensions, the incisiveness of the mirror is exacerbated by its perpendicularity, which by necessity involves intersection—the breaking of a line by another line. Moreover, observing that the mirror is "long" but not "full length," Tsuda preemptively and subtly redoubles the mirror's uncanny doubling: 'full length,' in the context of mirrors made for human use, means the length of an average human.

The image of himself in the mirror, which Tsuda perceives initially as a ghost, seems to be precisely the ur-example of the Freudience uncanny—the immortal soul that protects the ego from the recognition of its mortal body. Like Clarissa before her mirror,

[691] Soseki, *Meian*, 388

it is a moment in which the conditioned intellection of the enlightenment subject is suspended. Recalling the constitutional "forgetting" of Modernity, Tsuda cannot "remember ever glancing in a mirror and failing to confirm his confidence," and is "therefore a little surprised to observe something in this reflection that struck him as less than satisfying."[692] The Enlightenment mirror of rationality which confirms the identity of both subject and object becomes uncanny when it refuses to confirm the subject's self-image, and makes them subject to the image in the object. To be clear, the uncanny cute-*kawaii* of the mirror is not an effect of what it reveals about Tsuda—his weakness, his sickness—but *that it reveals*. That is, if the uncanny is at root the "contradiction of our wishes,"[693]then the mirror and Tsuda's mirror-image collaborate, but are not coextant, in their resistance to Tsuda's subjectivity. Both they and Tsuda are uncanny cute-*kawaii* in their assemblage. That this uncanny effect is a consequence of a particular kind of modern rationality is further suggested by Tsuda's rationalization of it alone in his room, which resembles the recurrent repression of spectrality Terry Castle identifies as imposition of post-enlightenment capitalist ideology. Tsuda reasons that "his behavior at the bottom of the stairs….observing the water eddy in the basin in the stillness and studying the uncomfortable image of himself in the mirror appeared...to have been a function of what would have to be called an abnormal mental state."[694] Tsuda's rationalization parallels Clarissa's subtractive recognition of her "self" in the mirror, which reduces the overdetermined significance of affect to what can be assigned rational

[692] Soseki, *Meian*, 388
[693] Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 164
[694] Soseki, *Meian*, 391

meaning. Moreover, a similar process has been identified at work in the main character of Soseki's *Kokoro*, Sensei, who "crafts a moralizing, emotion-laden narrative out of the chaos of his own affective responses in the past" in order to "translate momentary affects into powerful emotional narratives that make sense in retrospect."[695] Rather than a "moral sense," however, Tsuda is driven the enlightenment subject's fantasy of rationality and knowability, disavowing the experience of his self as an assemblage of intensities, rather than a psychological identity.

The register of the uncanny here might be characterized as *eerie,* a term Mark Fisher uses to describe the return of a repressed pre-Enlightenment relationship with materiality. In "striking contrast with the new materialist idea of "vibrant matter," which suggests that all matter is to some extent alive," Fisher suggests our uncanny relationship with things presents the possibility "that...*nothing* is alive: life is a region of death," and that "what is called organic life is actually a kind of folding of the inorganic."[696] This follows the same ontological oscillations of *prosopopoetic* face, and the etymology of *person*, and contains the same latent "threat" of the human being [a] thing. However, Soseki's novel does not address itself to what Tsuda perceives as a threat to his ego, but subtly marvels at the interactions between Tsuda and other things. Contradicting Professor Hirota's quip from *Sanshiro*, that translating nature always results in something human, humans and things exchange qualities. Furthermore, the passage follows the pattern of cute-*kawaii* profligacy: an enchantingly animating intimate affect travels

[695] Reiko Abe Auestad, "The Affect that Disorients *Kokoro*," 45-46
[696] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 84

circuitously through the manifold of interrelated things. At first appearing as a ghost, Tsuda observes that because he has "just been soaked in the tub, [his hair] glistened like lacquer," which puts "him in mind of a garden in the aftermath of a violent storm."[697] In John Nathan's translation, the uncanny is affected by the passive voice which even before Tsuda makes the analogy between his hair and lacquer presents him as the grammatical object "soaked in the tub," without presenting the tub as an agent. Instead of cause and effect, Tsuda's being wet and the bath's being wet are presented as fungible qualities—a relation of resemblance predicated on the possibility of appearing wet. The subsequent comparison with a garden after a storm is furthermore "put" into Tsuda's mind by an unnamed agent. Disassembling Tsuda from his hair, his mind, his image, and his agency, the uncanny cute-*kawaii* here nonetheless involves an assemblage of quasi-human things.

The cutification of Tsuda's post-Enlightenment humanity persists even as he attempts to reassert his rationality: "Stepping closer, Tsuda picked up the comb in front of the mirror. He combed his hair carefully, composing himself. When he finished with the comb and threw it down, the spell was broken; he was looking for his room as before."[698] Although Tsuda is the grammatical subject of these sentences, he is only ostensibly their agent. Capable of manipulating the comb, picking it up and throwing it down, Tsuda is himself the object of some manipulation. "Stepping closer" to the mirror as he picks up the comb, Tsuda's agency is undermined as the sentence concludes with an undecidable preposition "in front of the mirror" which applies to both Tsuda and the

[697] Soseki, *Meian*, 388
[698] Soseki, *Meian*, 388

comb. When the "spell is broken," it is not by Tsuda and it does not restore his status as subject. He merely regains the quality "looking for his room." The series of gerunds here, "stepping," "composing," and "looking" all relate Tsuda to the mirror in some fashion, and each circumscribes his agency. As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the mirror here appears as its material reality alongside its cultural significance. The mirrors in the bathhouse, besides startling Tsuda, function like the mirrors in a funhouse, confounding Tsuda's ability to competently navigate space. On his first night in the *onsen* it is immediately after Tsuda "passed the sink and the mirror at the top" of the stairs that he realizes "he had lost his way back to his room."[699]

The phenomenon recurs following the appearance of his ghost in the glass: "Realizing that ascending [the stairs] was not the way back and resolved to retrace his steps once again, he turned away from the mirror."[700] Again, although Tsuda is the grammatical subject of this sentence, the qualities of a subjectivity are dissociated from him. He does not 'realize,' but a realization occurs; he does not resolve, but is "resolved." What appears to act upon Tsuda is not merely the mirror itself, nor his image in it, but his image of his image in it as a particular kind of objectively rational, post-enlightenment subject who can be figured by the mirror. The reflection of the stairs in the mirror that alert Tsuda to his disorientation suggest the mirror's uncanny effect is related to modernity's subordination of the object world since Tsuda "perceived something distinctly different about them...as if they belonged in an imitation Western building."[701]

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[699] Soseki, *Meian*, 386
[700] Soseki, *Meian*, 388
[701] Ibid.

That the nature of this repression involves the profligate humanizing effect of cute-*kawaii* affect is suggested by the subtle movement from water to mirrors as the thing Tsuda reflects upon. Tsuda does not mark his "abnormal state of mind" from the moment he sees his ghost, but the moment observes that "only the water in the basins move," that "it circled like an eddy, rippling across the surface and folding in on itself as he watched, as if it were breathing."[702] The simultaneous resemblance between water and the living animal body, and water and a mirror signals an absolute categorical collapse, a fluid movement into and out of, or *through* each other that describes the relationship of both breath to the body and water to itself. It presents in the more ambivalent affect of wonder the intuition Mark Fisher attributes to the uncanny, that "There is no inside except as a folding of the outside, the mirror cracks, I am an other and I always was."[703]

Soseki's novel articulates the ethical dimensions of this shift from a profligate to a determinate human form more explicitly than Woolf's. Castigating himself for his irrationality, Tsuda declares that "to disgrace himself in the eyes of others was more than he could contemplate. Saving face was the fundament of his ethics. His only thought was that appearances must be preserved."[704] Here the face appears at once as the objectified, psychologized face of the post-enlightenment subject, and the cute-*kawaii* face of a 'human,' with the invocation of the former serving to repress the latter. The image of a human face re-appears the evening subsequent to the appearance of his ghost in the mirror in a parallel encounter, in which another living human face appears alternately as

[702] Soseki, *Meian*, 387
[703] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 12
[704] Soseki, *Meian*, 402

mirror and ghost, *and simultaneously* person and thing. On the same stairs he lost himself, Tsuda encounters his former lover, Koyoko. As the scene proceeds, Kiyoko transforms from object to agent, but remains in each form an essentially other and embodied thing. At first, "She stood there so rigidly it appeared that a single finger...might topple her as if she were a clay figurine," but "as her body stiffened, the muscles in her face also tensed. And the color in her cheeks and forehead visibly drained."[705] Initially, Kiyoko appears as an absolutely cute-*kawaii* and purely passive thing. A "clay figurine" Kiyoko is figured as not merely an object, but a rudimentary art object that conjures the physical sensation of the human hand exercising its agency on the earth. However, already affected by human form Kiyoko's body materially resists Tsuda's figuration. As opposed to pliant clay, she "stiffens" and just as Tsuda "resolved to call out to her...she comes to life,"[706] vanishing into her room. Like the muteness of the cute-*kawaii*, Kiyoko's silence is an absence of signification that functions as the sign of a *significant* other of ambiguous agency. Thus while "critics' tendency to categorize Soseki's female characters as either an "ideal woman" (*tenjo no onna, eien no onna*) or as an "actual woman" (*chijo no onna, genjitsu no onna*),"[707] Kiyoko appears as a complex interplay between not merely the actual woman, and a cultural or personal ideal, but between material and virtual as they enfold the possibilities of something's coming to appear as real or ideal. Kiyoko is not merely the object of Tsuda's self-affirming fantasy, but also a human person, and the impression of that human person *upon* Tsuda—her

[705] Soseki, *Meian*, 390
[706] Soseki, *Meian*, 415
[707] Reiko Abe Auestad, "The Reception of Soseki's *Kojin* and *Meian* in Japan and the West," 246

becoming his ideal as an approximation of her actual presence.

Like the cute-*kawaii* mirror, Kiyoko's face appears to occupy an ambiguous position between subject and object, human and thing which involves an asymmetrical reciprocity or resemblance outside of predetermined categories of acted and acted upon. While her silence bespeaks the possibilities of agency and meaning, her face underlines the possibility of their unattainability. The blanching of Kiyoko's cheeks and forehead functions both as a physical and a metaphysical mirror for Tsuda. Recalling his own ghostlike pallor of the previous evening, Tsuda is immediately affected by the idea that "a similar emotion seemed to have assaulted Kiyoko with even more virulence," which suggests that she, like Tsuda, or conceivably any person might, responds to the sudden reappearance of her ex-lover as metaphorically, if not literally an encounter with a ghost. Tsuda's intuition, or apprehension, or misrecognition of the meaning of her expression in this moment is later rendered by him in cute-*kawaii* terms: "Lowering her gaze innocently...from the top of the stairs and recognizing Tsuda appeared to occur at once and yet were not truly simultaneous...Between oblivion and discovery, time elapsed...a progression of feelings from surprise...to disbelief."[708] While her gaze is "innocent" with regard to recognizing Tsuda (as far as he can determine), the guilelessness and submissiveness suggested by the "lowering" of her gaze is reversed by the higher vantage point she occupies on the stairs. The expression that seems to reflect Tsuda's own, which resides "between oblivion and discovery," and oscillates between "surprise and disbelief," is aptly described by "wonder" as an experience of indeterminate human

[708] Soseki, *Meian*, 415

significance.

The face, as a thing which is related to human beings, but not merely instrumentalized by them, is also a thing which relates human beings *as a material consequence of its being invisible*. Tsuda recognizes the possibility of shared feeling through his identification with his image in the mirror as a psychological subject. The following morning however, Tsuda's attempts to secure the meaning of Kiyoko's face through rational investigation are thwarted by Kiyoko. Tsuda asks, '"You went pale last night, didn't you, at the top of the stairs?"' and she responds "I suppose so. I couldn't see my own face so I don't know, but if you say I did I must have."[709] Rather than the cute-*kawaii* imposing a particular human appearance, it appears in Kiyoko's response as human being's absent understanding of itself. Against the enlightenment identification with a psychological human subject, rational and autonomous, Kiyoko invokes the specter of the face that is materially oriented toward the other, and is without the intervention of some other thing inaccessible to the self. The face as a locus of human meaning is dependent upon the face's being a human-like *thing* as opposed to a human *subject*. This does not mean, however, the face has no relationship to a human interior. Instead, the cute-*kawaii* face suggests a more complex relationship between a human interior and the world of things.

Recalling Kiyoko's expression to himself, Tsuda "painted in his mind in spite of himself an imaginary scene more vivid than reality," before he "abruptly came to his senses with a shudder," and becoming "aware of feeling shame and humiliation

[709] Soseki, *Meian*, 415

distantly," feels "the inside of his cheeks begin to burn as if to symbolize his feelings."[710] Enjoying Yano's cute-*kawaii* blush with what Mark Fisher identifies as the bodily expression of eeriness, the shudder, Soseki's bodily response highlights the instability of designating an inside and outside the human being. Tsuda's blushing face asymmetrically resembles the blanching face of Kiyoko, and both suggest a resemblance between the flowing of blood within bodies, the flowing of meaning and feeling amongst bodies, and the flowing of water.

The Peopling of Paintings

The cute-*kawaii* entanglement of human form and the non-human as it appears as the face in the mirror opens onto the the most expansive capacity of cute-*kawaii* mimesis in the mode of 'entrainment," Of which perhaps the best, and among the cutest examples is the linguistic phenomenon referred to as *motherese*. A "highly expressive, patterned, and repetitive way of speaking with exaggerated changes in pitch and intonation," motherese, or "baby-talk," seems "designed to capture the babies' attention," and involves not just vocalization, but "the babies' preferred...movements in their particular rhythm, pace, and intensity."[711] Moreover, when psychologists reviewed footage of mothers and babies in slow motion they discovered "the babies' apparently random kicking and wriggling happened in time with their mothers' rhythms."[712] Ngai's assessment of cute-*kawaii prosopopoeia* as a "self-reflecting circularity" that always fails "to establish the addressee as a fully independent and separate entity capable of

[710] Soseki, *Meian*, 402
[711] Anna Gibbs, "After Affect", 197
[712] Ibid.

responding," does not consider that the entity addressed may not be capable of responding in the language of an "independent" subject, and *also not* a degraded form of the human.[713] While baby-talk might appear insipid when directed towards a pet or another adult, motherese is not merely the adult's parodic imitation of the child's speech, but a process and a *medium* of coevolving communication. Extrapolating, Anna Gibbs theorizes motherese as a mode of mimetic communication which is "not just a feature of mothers and babies," but involves the 'entrainment' of one person with another, as when someone's gestures and movements are synchronized with their speech, or when an attentive listener's...invisible movements are synchronized with the speech rhythms of the person to whom they are listening,"[714]

When a child mouths the words of his storybook as he struggles to read silently, a kind of intimacy, imitation and identification with other persons and things that appears not merely formal or conceptual, but material and viscera occurs. For that reason, Gibbs argues, communicative mimesis should not be understood as an equivalence of identity. The form of reciprocity," evinced by the cute-*kawaii* resembles what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "becoming" in that it is "asymmetrical but both parties to the process are deterritorialized."[715] While "similarity is crucial" to the success of mimetic communication, it could not communicate—would not discourse—without difference. In the infant's development of language, Gibbs writes, "it is the *difference,* or the correspondence [between signs]...that facilitates the infant's gradual recognition of the

[713] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 91–96
[714] Gibbs, "After Affect", 197
[715] Gibbs, "After Affect", 194

interiority of the other (as well as of itself)" and the "increasing awareness that experience can be communicated and shared."[716] Significantly, entrainment is not merely a quality of relation that applies to human/human or human/nonhuman relations, but a mode of understanding ontological entanglement more broadly. The exemplary process of becoming involves the mimetic coevolution of a wasp and an orchid in which "the orchid imitates the wasp so that for a moment the wasp becomes part of the orchid'...reproductive system, while the orchid in turn becomes part of the wasp's alimentary system."[717]Rather than assimilative, cute-*kawaii* mimesis appears radically disjunctive with regards to identity, as its entanglement of resemblances comes to resemble the possibility of *meaning as such*—as flower and wasp mean to each other, or a human and a rat.

Ngai's compares cute-*kawaii*'s mimetic imperative to both Adorno's conception of poetry as "mimetic language," and Benjamin's concept of a "mimetic faculty" which might compel children at play "to identify with inanimate objects such as 'a windmill and a train."[718] Without asserting the cute-*kawaii* directly corresponds with poetic language, Ngai suggests the cute-*kawaii* might be similarly characterized as "a turn away from conceptual or communicative language as a turn toward 'mimetic' language, where...mimesis means 'an assimilation of the self to the other...a kind of enactment."[719] She emphasizes that for Benjamin "Imitation...is at home in the playing, not in the

[716] Gibbs, "After Affect", 195
[717] Gibbs, "After Affect", 195
[718] Benjamin, qtd. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 75
[719] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 99

plaything" thus locating mimesis not in the object but in the subject."[720] 'Entrainment,' as Anna Gibbs understands it, describes a mode of mimetic communication that functions similarly to these examples of mimetic language, but does not privilege the human subject as agent. Instead, entrainment involves the world of things is as active a participant in its resemblances as the human—which is to say indeterminately. It describes the "dancing rhythmical movement"[721] Lily Briscoe attains as she paints, matching the movement of her brush to what appears, and approximating "the union of subject and object."[722] Lily's painting, like the orchid's imitation of the bee, motherese, and the Japanese student's child-writing involves a kind of intimacy through imitation with other persons and things that appears not merely as formal or conceptual identification, but material and visceral transformation.

Lily Briscoe's painting of Mrs. Ramsay reading to her child from Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, an example from within the *kinderschema* paradigm, demonstrates the aptness of *amae*. The introduction of her painting is preluded by Lily's rhapsodic contemplation of the possibility of "unity," with Mrs. Ramsay. "Could loving," she asks herself, her head in Mrs. Ramsay's lap, "make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity she desired...nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself which is knowledge."[723] Though the painting presents a "simple, obvious, commonplace" scene of maternal domesticity it is also charged with a queer

[720] Ibid.
[721] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*,
[722] Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes*, 353
[723] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 51

erotics that it attempts to articulate *outside of the legible*, or *the readable*. Lily, in fact, makes "no attempt at likeness," no attempt, that is, to subordinate these subjects to already existing systems of referentiality and representation. Layered upon this is the cultural assumption that "women can't paint," which further calls into question the legibility of Lily's painting *as* constructed within those systems. Impressionistic, Lily's painting softens shapes such that the boundaries between persons, things, and environments blur together. In need of an "object" to balance the composition, Lily considers the child, "James perhaps."[724] Mrs. Ramsay, the mother, "famous for her beauty," is rendered as a "triangular purple shape," "a purple shadow," "that no one could tell...for a human shape."[725] "While the human figure dominates British landscape"[726], Lily minimizes the mother and child. Within the painting's broader "unity," mother and child figure only as "relations of mass, of lights and shadows," and appear only because "a light here required a shadow there."[727]

Patricia Laurence argues that Lily Briscoe, who perceives the human figure through "little chinese eyes[728]", paints Mrs. Ramsay and James after the manner of a "Song Landscape", representing them "as a part of the whole of nature: mountains, sky, rivers, and trees."[729] Laurence furthermore commutes to Lily's work the Chinese tradition's non-differentiation of painting and writing, and of subject and object. She observes that Woolf calls attention to "not only the 'seeing' but the performance, the

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[724] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 53
[725] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 52
[726] Laurence, Patricia. Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes : Bloomsbury, Modernism, and China, 352
[727] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*,
[728] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*,
[729] Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes*, 352

process of painting." [730] Lily attains, as her brush daubs and lifts, "a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes were another, and *all were related*."[731] This movement is traced *and* revealed by the material accumulation of paint on the canvas such that they enfold the subjective acts of the artist into the physical medium and material practices underlying any 'objective' representation. Emphasizing the physicality of Lily's painting, Laurence argues that Woolf positions Lily alongside "the long tradition of Chinese painting," which "has never concealed its process, often revealing...brush strokes on the canvas".[732] In that context, painting appears alongside poetry as a "literary art", in part because it is not taken to "represent a scene", but rather to "hold the...imagined colors, concept, thought, emotion, and philosophical notion that has moved the artist to paint."[733] Consequently, there is no pretension to the representation's objectivity, it is understood always to be representative of something in particular space-time relation with the world, and this is marked in the painting "in the form of a calligraphic verse inscription." Rather than opposed, the visual and the literary arts are expressively intertwined in the Chinese tradition such that a "painting is enhanced by and is indistinguishable from the strokes of the characters" of its inscription.

The illegibility of Lily's painting from the point of view of realist representation thus makes legible a form of valuation, or evaluation that had been occluded. It stages a simultaneity of reading-representing that unsettles received modes of understanding the

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[730] Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes,* 353
[731] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*,
[732] Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes*, 353
[733] Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes*, 354

objects of representation. Lily identifies the significance of the domestic scene in the particular way it appears as itself to her, as a scene of *being with* Mrs. Ramsay, who appears as a mother *in the moment*. Lily's unwelcome observer and hopeful suitor Mr. Bankes expects mother and child to figure in her painting as "objects of universal veneration", and wonders if they can be thus "reduced...without irreverence."[734]. Lily takes his critique to mean her painting fails to pay its objects proper "tribute."[735] The association between art, femininity, "objects of veneration," and "tribute" here recalls Barbara Johnson's assessment of aestheticization as necessarily a process of *objectification* that in some sense requires the death of the aesthetic object.[736] Resilient, if not outspoken, Lily insists "if art must be a tribute," there are "other senses too in which one might reverence" mother and child. Withdrawing her from a culturally masculine gaze that links her to an aesthetically objectified "beauty,' Lily's transformation of Mrs. Ramsay refigures her within a vitalistic, animated natural world, suggesting the *kawaii's* appearance as a "naive unity with the world,"[737] particularly in light of the muteness the medium of painting enforces on the scene of reading aloud, registering "dumb" in both its senses. Extricating mother and child from their purely social significance as sentimentalized and gendered signs of middle class domestic prosperity, Lily draws attention to the significance of *how they appear in relation to what appears around, or with, or alongside them*. That "light requires shadow" is, after all, not just a

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735 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
736 Johnson, *Persons and Things*
737 Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 236-238

compositional principle, but a material necessity of *how beings appear in the world*.

"Subduing all her impressions as a woman to something more general," Lily's artistic impulse contains a maximalist vigor that is in tension with the narrow significance allotted to Mrs. Ramsay by Mr. Bankes.[738] Her subduction of herself is, furthermore, one way in which Lily *cutifies* herself. Infantilized, old-maided, pitied, and othered by men and women throughout the novel, to shrink herself in this instance is also an *expansion of the possible*. "Under the power of that vision" of the whole painting, Lily "must...grope' through memories of "hedges and houses and mothers and children" to make "what she wished to make of it."[739] In one sense, Lily's pluralization of "mothers and children" is a kind of dedifferentiation or massification that undercuts the "reverence" Mr. Banks attributes to their representation, an example of the "affective wane," Ngai associates with cute-*kawaii's* regressive forms. However, there is also a sense in which the pluralization diffuses the identities of mothers and children among the innumerable individuals subsumed in them, marked by them, or scraped against them. It being her being "as a woman" she submits to her vision, we might argue that one form of Lily's aesthetic "tribute" is the stability of her own self-conception as a "woman," which, necessarily appearing alongside conceptions of *"woman" in general*, threatens to destabilize the appearance of "woman" as a whole. As it attaches to more and other individuals, the category ceases to name and begins to resonate. Exposing the internal instability of such an array of multiply being "women," its vulnerability to deformation

[738] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*,
[739] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*,

and transformation each time it is predicated of this or that individual, Lily's sacrifice enables her to protect the particular significance of Mrs. Ramsay by enhancing the background noise of the sign "woman." It thus appears to be the case that Lily Briscoe's painting becomes *cuter* the less it adheres to the strictly biological form of the *kinderschema*, or to a strict social construction of sentimental domesticity, and the more it dwells on the compositional interrelatedness of the whole that *includes itself*.

In Soseki's *Sanshiro* "entrainment" functions similarly, turning on the interplay between persons and things, and the impression of a particular example enabling a more expansive relationship to human form. Whereas Lily Briscoe focalizes a style of being a woman through the example of Mrs. Ramsay, Mineko, with whom Sanshiro is romantically entangled, focalizes a a commodified and reified style of Japanese femininity in the context of Westernization. While Lily's painterly technique has been compared with the Chinese, the painter Haraguchi's goal in painting Mineko is explicitly to reproduce a Western style realist portrait. As he paints, he and Sanshiro both engage in a process of mimetic entrainment with Mineko. In neither case is imitation merely a reification of Mineko as an idealized object, although both she and her image are made into objects. Instead, by juxtaposing Sanshiro and Haraguchi's impressions of Mineko, Soseki emphasizes the multiple and complex interplays between the sensuous and the significant, the real and the virtual, and the material and ideal. Explaining how he selected Mineko to sit for his painting, Haraguchi expounds for Sanshiro his theory of a material basis of aesthetic ideals. He emphasizes to Sanshiro the significance of Mineko's eyes, which are larger and rounder than those of the average Japanese woman. This is

important, Haraguchi argues, because if "you find a beauty in Western art, and no matter who's painted her, they all have big eyes. They all have these funny-looking big eyes," and consequently "As nice and Japanese as they look to us...narrow eyes look terrible in western style painting. People think you've painted a blind woman."[740]

The figuration of the Japanese as "blind" here links the issue of representation and mimesis to the novel's recurring motifs of light, science, and the enlightenment in addition to racialization and globalization. Nonomiya, to whom Mineko will eventually be married much to Sanshiro's dismay, is an experimental physicist experimenting with the materiality of light. Vision occupies not only a privileged position within western culture historically,[741] but is one of the particular "scopic regimes" of modernity "which, arising with the Italian Renaissance, when linear perspective became the dominant pictorial convention, inspired other modes of inquiry based on the reputedly detached, disembodied, dispassionate eye."[742] (The specter of the Mona Lisa appears again, arising with or within this scopic regime). Conversely, Haraguchi continues, in the Japanese tradition, "women always have narrow eyes, from images of Kannon down to comic masks and Noh masks, and especially the beauties in *ukiyo-e* prints."[743] The variety and specificity of the artefacts Haraguchi groups here, in stark contrast with the vaguely big-eyed Western "beauties" suggests both that Haraguchi has absorbed the rationalist disposition to the extent that he is invested in systemization and classification, but also

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[740] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 189
[741] Jenks, Chris. "The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction." *Visual Culture*
[742] Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," 3-28 qtd. Dimock, "A Theory of Resonance" 1066
[743] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 189

the insufficiency of the knowledge and relations produced by such a disposition. Under the sign of "Japanese art," Haraguchi unites depictions of Kannon, goddess of compassion, the artificial faces of Noh masks, and *Ukiyo-e* woodblock printing.

The last of these examples in particular is curious because it frames "Japanese-ness" as a question of what appears to be Japanese *in the West*. The most famous woodblock printer, Hokusai, is also among Japan's most well-known artists. However, as Inaga Shigemi argues, "Hokusai's reputation as the most eminent Japanese painter owes mainly to the interpretations of French "Japonisants" as opposed to the assessment of Japanese artists and critics.[744] Moreover, part of the appeal of Hokusai in the west was related to his adaptation of the Renaissance technique of linear perspective. First appearing in Japan in the 18th century, linear perspective "was reinterpreted and transformed into an aesthetic device of exaggerating the effect of contrast between the near and the far." Rather than European realism, what emerged was the use artists "linear perspective as an element of design" in order to produce a composition "'without apparent system.'"[745] Not merely a reproduction of a Western technique, it is nonetheless the case that what was regarded as typically Japanese composition" in Hokusai's prints "was in reality the result of recent European influence among Japanese artists."[746] What appears to the Western or Westernized eye as the formal sign of an essential Japanese-ness is instead the sign of the instability of categorization.[747]Rather than establishing a

[744] Shigemi, "The Making of Hokusai's Reputation in the Context of *Japonisme,*" 77
[745] Shigemi, "The Making of Hokusai's Reputation in the Context of *Japonisme*," 84
[746] Ibid.
[747] This is true also of the goddess Kannon. A syncretic figure, Kannon was first venerated in India as the bodhisattva of compassion before migrating to China, and then Japan. In the Edo period, when

coherent Japanese aesthetic tradition then, Haraguchi's examples demonstrate the lack of an essential Japanese-ness within the tradition.

To the extent that these artefacts reflect a Japanese identity in Haraguchi's rationalized schema, it is as a reflection of an abstracted Japanese phenotype. Despite this, his aesthetic theory does not appear entirely inaccurate. According to Haraguchi's reasoning, "There was no way for an aesthetic of big eyes to develop where materials were so scarce. Our ideal come from among narrow eyes, where there is so much freedom of choice."[748] A materialist and a rationalist, Haraguchi links aesthetic ideals to the realistic reproduction of things in the world, and claims the ideal is formed on the basis of the form of the latter. The 'materials' Haraguchi references are people; specifically, examples of people with big eyes. Furthermore, as a rational subject Haraguchi assigns agency to the human artist who has "so much freedom of choice" with regards to narrow-eyed models. However, in the rationalist schema these positions are contradictory. The agency of the artist is circumscribed by the materials available to him. He is not the subject, but the object of his circumstances. Similarly, Haraguchi emphasizes to Sanshiro that he "picked Mineko's eyes" positioning himself as the subject of object selection. Haraguchi's model, in turn, is objectified. Mineko is valued by him within an abstracted system of exchange, as a symbol of Japanese modernity. This is not to suggest that Japanese women had never before suffered under systems of patriarchal repression, but that the mode of objectification wherein the subject claims sovereignty

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Christianity could not be practiced publicly in Japan, figurines of Kannon were used to represent the Virgin Mary, eventually merging into a composite figure "Maria Kannon."

[748] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 189

over an instrumentalizable object of knowledge is a particularly modern one.

Sanshiro, too, has a mimetic encounter with Mineko. While Hanaguchi offers a rationalist account of the process, appearing to be based in material fact, Sanshiro experiences mimesis more intensely—and more naively. I do not suggest that Sanshiro's experience is *pre-modern*, but that it resembles the pre-modern experience inasmuch as Sanshiro the person regards things with child-like wonder. While his friend Yojiro sardonically claims Sanshiro has "the face of a man who's tired of life—a *fin de siecle* face," it's all Greek to Sanshiro: "Phrases like *fin de siecle* had no power to please him, so little had he breathed the air of artificiality. Nor could he use them yet as toys, so little did he know of certain circles."[749] Sanshiro is cute, not only because he has a sleepy mien, and because he is clueless with regard to both society and romance, but because his "Painful slowness of speech was comically mismatched with Yojiro's patter."[750] Unfamiliar with the world in which he walks, Sanshiro's primary mode of engaging is to wonder, alternating between aesthetic rapture and general confusion. As he watches Haraguchi paint Mineko, he engages in the former:

"Within the silence there was Mineko, and the image of Mineko gradually taking shape. All that moved was the fat painter's brush. It moved only to the eye; to the ear it was silent." "Sealed in silence, Mineko remained utterly still...She was already a picture. As Sanshiro saw it, Haraguchi was not painting Mineko; he was copying a painting of

[749] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 53
[750] Ibid.

mysterious depth, using all his energy to make an ordinary picture that lacked precisely this depth. And yet, within the silence, the second Mineko was moving ever closer to the first."[751]

Like Lily Briscoe's entraining painting, Sanshiro's experience is of a complex interconnectedness, even as it is narrowed in on Mineko. Also like Lily, Sanshiro's wonder is laced with eroticism, which is not the same as objectification. As distinguished by Martha Nussbaum, the former involves the sensuous particularity of the embodied person, while the latter merely engages with the material form. Our experience of the erotic is therefore not coextensive with the sexual. Besides Mineko, Sanshiro also has an erotic experience of the brush, the "fat painter" Haraguchi, and the silence which surrounds them. Most significantly, while Sanshiro's experience is narrated primarily in terms of the "scopic regime" of the visual, the refrain of silence— "within the silence," "was silent," "sealed in silence," "within the silence"—makes the absence of the auditory palpable. It is a present absence—pregnant with specters.

Silence here comes to signify *the absence of signification* as the sign of an agency—the deliberate hush of rapt attention. The materialization of silence signals the disruption of both the logocentric and the visual paradigms of western rationalism. Nothing in this moment is distinctly object or subject, spirit or matter, acting or acted-upon. Instead, Sanshiro's experience occurs at the affective register, in which the identity of things remains incipient. Space and motion, like silence, are present as a qualium

[751] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 183

among qualia, at once independent and interdependent. Mineko's silence is associated with her "utter" stillness, and yet "the image of" Mineko "gradually takes shape," and "moves ever closer to the first." At the same time, "All that moved...was the brush," and yet "it moved only to the eye; to the ear it was silent."

The stillness of the agent reveals the dynamism of things. The "movement" associated with the paint brush is transposed and dislocated as the expected visual and auditory signs of motion unalign with each other. Things and their qualities, which should be secured to each other, detach and reattach. The brush, which should merely be Haraguchi's instrument, usurps his hand as the agent of the painting (before ceding to Mineko's image). The brush pronomially expands and contracts as the subject of the sentence shifts from "all" to "it," and the thing itself is suspended between postcedent and antecedent.

Mineko, her image in the painting, and the image of her that appears to Sanshiro, are similarly suspended in identity. The thing that Mineko is—what appears to be a feeling, thinking, desiring thing—-resembles, but is not identical with the image that appears. Nonetheless, the resemblance between Mineko and her images marks an uncomfortable ambiguity in Sanshiro's perception of the human being, Mineko. Mineko's images too appear as a feeling, thinking, desiring things. Moreover, in this passage, it is only images that appear as feeling, thinking, desiring things—and the human becomes non-identical with itself as the purported opposite of the thing. For Sanshiro, Mineko is "already a picture," and therefore "as Sanshiro saw it, Haraguchi was not painting Mineko." Mineko, the person, subject, human, body, etc. is beyond

Haraguchi's grasp. Instead, the painter merely copied "a painting of mysterious depth," producing "an ordinary picture that lacked precisely this depth." This second painting which contains the 'first' Mineko furthermore implies a Mineko which is the antecedent of the first. A copy of a copy, without apparent original, these images of Mineko are indistinguishable except that the image in the literal painting "lacks precisely" the "mysterious depth" of the first Mineko. Depth implies inwardness, but experienced as a "painting" even the embodied Mineko is made to appear not as a psychological subject, but a possibility of being human that she comes to *share* with her image. The human Mineko, the will that sustains the stillness and silence out of which the painting emerges, is spectralized—signified by the absence of language.

Sanshiro's perception of a mysterious depth is an experience of being affected by the cute-*kawaii* in which Mineko's humanity is entangled with, but not reducible to, an Enlightenment conception of the rational human subject. That "the second Mineko was moving ever closer to the first,"[752] might appear menacing or uncanny, but as it occurs to Sanshiro the primary mood of the scene is an ambivalent wonder. The abundance of doubleness here is a function of this wonder which registers Mineko as both person and thing, but in either case as *herself*—endowed with human dignity. This is not to dispute there is a process of objectification at work in Sanshiro's perception of Mineko, but to point to the way in which Sanshiro nonetheless registers her as something to which he is ethically response-able. In fact, it appears to be the case that it is as an image that Sanshiro's conception of Mineko resists being reified and instrumentalized for him. To

[752]Ibid.

Sanshiro, Mineko is not significant because she represents a type valued in the west, but because she is herself. She signifies—as Japanese young people say of their cute-*kawaii* accessories—only her "self-likeness (*jinbun-rasha*)." Her self-likeness is what is consistent between the iterations of her self-image through different ontologies: as idea, as painting, as body, as absence. The distinction between depth and inwardness suggested here is the experience of moving *through* these instances, without entering *into* any. What is "inside" a human subject is delimited in a way cute-*kawaii*'s affectation of human dignity is not.

Sanshiro's mimetic engagement is therefore not merely a matter of reproduction. Like Lily, unlike Haraguchi, Sanshiro's reproduction is a mode of enactment, in which what is reproduced is not identical but *another*—repetition with difference. It is an experience of mimesis not as identification, but resemblance in that it is an experience of Mineko's "non-identity," the possibility of her appearing in another way. In other moments of rapture, the experience is protracted, and resemblance to Mineko is traced inscrutably between accumulating referents. In these instances, which also focus on Mineko's eyes, the association between human significance, response-ability, and the cute-*kawaii* is more pronounced. In the first, Sanshiro's being affected by Mineko is multiply mediated and transformed, not merely soliciting a response, but stimulating responsive-ness. To begin, Sanshiro is compelled not merely to reproduce Mineko's eyes, but to translate them using not just language to capture the visual but "an English word" gleaned from his aesthetics class: "Voluptuous!"[753] Eyes, figures of the Enlightenment

[753] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 94

subject's disembodied rationality, in Mineko's face appear to resemble to Sanshiro not merely a body, but an eroticized, fleshy body. "Voluptuous," which Sanshiro gleans from his aesthetics lecture, further links Mineko's eyes with the "women painted by Greuze," an 18th century French painter whose most notable works feature portraits of children the "expressive head" genre, which emphasized an "open expression of sentiment (not sentimentality)" and "curiosity about emotional and intellectual development in children."[754]

From human eye to human body to a particular genre of painting which compounds the affective and the intellectual and centers on the non-verbal expressions of childhood wonder, Sanshiro's experience of Mineko here is simultaneously of her as person and thing, and expressly cute-*kawaii*. Sanshiro broaches the possibility of *prosopopoeia*, but cannot realize it. He insists Mineko's eyes "were trying to tell him something," but can articulate this only as "something voluptuous, something that appealed directly to the senses." Though seemingly pleasurable, this appeal is "far from sweet"; for Sanshiro "it was excruciating."[755] The comparison of Mineko to paintings of women and children layers here with images of the cute-*kawaii* as a purely powerless and passive thing, but also calls attention to how those things themselves only appear as passive and blank. The cutification of Mineko's eyes which renders them significant without signification occurs later to her eyelids, further undercutting associations between the eye and the rational subject: Sanshiro finds "in the soft crease of Mineko's

[754] Katherin Baetjer, "Jean-Baptiste Greuze," https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grze/hd_grze.htm
[755] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 69

eyelids some unfathomable meaning, and in that meaning a fatigues of the spirit, a slackness of the flesh, an appeal close to suffering."[756] This experience of human being, and human significance blurs material and virtual, as the trace movement of Sanshiro's eyes along "the soft crease" of eyelids is both a bodily and an affective reproduction, which recursively feeds the conceptual things they resemble.

For Adorno, the non-identity of a thing describes the difference between the thing and its concepts, an ontic residuum of things ontologically figured as objects experienced through the sensuous and reflective engagement with the thing in its particularity: "a presence that acts upon us: we knowers are haunted...by a painful, nagging feeling that something's being forgotten or left out."[757] But the non-identity of the cute-*kawaii* is an experience of a simultaneity of presence of absence. When Tsuda suddenly encounters Kiyoko at the *onsen* and she becomes "for Tsuda a kind of painting," the presence of imaginary painting is doubled in the presence of an imaginary absence as "the impression he received would remain engraved on his heart."[758] Recalling the carving out that writing is, the pathos the cute-*kawaii*'s appeal, in which anything might appear with a particularly human-like dignity, or significance is key to the affect's "utopian potential," in which "interactions with a cute entity and its singular set of phenomenal qualities can constitute resistance to systems of control" and "the logic of commodification."[759] Being familiar with the possibilities of appearing-as Mineko Sanshiro is only "startled," when

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[756] Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 94
[757] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, qtd. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 14
[758] Soseki, *Meian*, 390
[759] Megan Arkenberg, "Cuteness and Control in Portal," 69-70

naked in a changing he encounters a "large poster for the Mitsukoshi fabric" featuring "a drawing of a pretty woman who looked something like Mineko," rather than seduced. He observes, "the eyes are different."[760]

It is not merely the possibility of resisting systems of control, however, but the fact of resistance to identification cute-*kawaii* signifies. The cute-*kawaii*, as it affects the appearance of being human, marks the impossibility of totalizing the human, since it signifies the entanglement with other things that makes the meaning of human being fugitive. On the last page of both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Meian*, the human being escapes as it appears. Peter Walsh, finally to meet Clarissa face to face, declares at last: "There she was." The past tense underlines the irony of Peter's premature ejaculation. Clarissa vanishes as she appears, and something is forgotten. Tsuda, have also at last come face to face with the woman he once loved is left wondering: "Kiyoko smiled. On the way back to his room, Tsuda attempted alone with himself to explain the meaning of her smile." Here something is left out. The meaning of the smile cannot be secured, but it cannot even be approached without reference to what seems, what appears to what an "other" (human?) means.[761]

[760] Soseki*, Sanshiro*, 117
[761] Soseki, *Meian*, 419

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