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# Introduction: 'The Intimacy of Strangers'

Lidia Curti

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## Of contagion and viruses

La souillure elle-même est à peine une  
représentation et celle-ci est noyée dans une peur  
spécifique qui bouche la réflexion; avec la souillure  
nous entrons au règne de la Terreur.<sup>1</sup>

Paul Ricœur

Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the  
relation of order to disorder, being to non-being,  
form to formlessness, life to death.

Mary Douglas

- 1 The role of Western medical science in the definition of diversity has been crucial and can be extended to other sciences such as biology, anthropology, sociology and technology in general. A part of this development is drawn from social Darwinism with its view of linear progressive time with humans, inevitably white western men, at its apex above non-human living beings and plants. Recent developments in these fields have critically underlined this feature that goes from the general frame of positivism to the more specific developments of present-day (neo)capitalism and neoliberalism.<sup>2</sup>
- 2 A greater awareness of the urgency of resistance to the progressive devastation of the planet has also come from contemporary speculative feminism, seeking a manner of living together in a symbiotic chain between beings of every species and nature. Donna Haraway's recent book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), refers to the art of living in deeply troubled times, surviving in discomfort, coexisting with devastation. Commencing from the mono-cellular organisms at the origins of life, we depend on one another in a necessary symbiosis. Lynn Margulis, a radical evolutionary theorist and cellular biologist, has derived from her studies of microbes and bacteria the concept of 'the intimacy of strangers' as the most fundamental practice of becoming-with with each other in Earth's history.<sup>3</sup> In biological science, evolutionism is considered not

so much as the result of a competitive process as of cooperation between all the organisms that inhabit Gaia.

- 3 The essays in this volume relate the links of Western thought (and its structure of feelings) to notions of alterity and diversity, particularly, though not only, in matters of illness and medical systems. The relation to the other, the stranger, follows patterns and metaphors such as dirt, pollution, contagion, and hence borders and thresholds between differences: national and ethnic belongings, linguistic, religious and cultural formations, bodies and skins, sexuality, food. Nineteenth century anthropologists considered the relation to the threshold of cleanliness as the touchstone for differentiating primitive and advanced cultures, implying that a conservative attitude concerning the social order was a self-evident and natural phenomenon and not the result of social power relations.
- 4 In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas explored the cultural notion of dirt and its symbolic meanings, underlining its link to taboo and xenophobic attitudes and, ultimately, to the views we entertain of other cultures. She insisted on the relativity of the notion of dirt, showing how different cultures have their own thresholds of cleanliness. According to Douglas, the evolution of cultural patterns is an example of how Western anthropologists established a condescending approach towards other cultures, expressing their Eurocentrism and promoting distinctions between cultures as a policing of public health.
- 5 Dirt is an offence against the ideal order of society and is considered a danger leading to transgression. Douglas saw uncleanness as matter out of place and, against the distinction between primitives and moderns, observed that we are all subject to the same rules: "The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus, we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagions."<sup>4</sup> She considered the elimination of dirt not as a negative movement, but as a positive effort to organize the environment, partly neglecting the role of a hegemonic discourse that uses definitions of pure and impure, clean and unclean, to establish social hierarchies. Her analysis of purification rites is, however, a precious guide to locating dirt and pollution as a limit, a frontier device, on the margin of order, from which symbolic patterns are derived and become social rules.
- 6 In a similar manner, Julia Kristeva considers abjection as an exclusion or taboo, in food and ways of life in general, and at the same time a site of ambiguity:
 

Il y a, dans l'abjection, une de ces violentes et obscures révoltes de l'être contre ce qui le menace et qui lui paraît venir d'un dehors ou d'un dedans exorbitant, jeté à côté du possible, du tolérable, du pensable [...] Frontière sans doute, l'abjection est surtout ambiguïté. Parce que [...] elle ne détache pas radicalement le sujet de ce qui le menace – au contraire, elle l'avoue en perpétuel danger.<sup>5</sup>

There is, in abjection, one of those violent and obscure revolts of one's being against that which threatens it and which seems to come from an outside or an irregular inside, thrown against the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable [...] A border, doubtless, abjection is above all ambiguity. Because [...] it does not radically separate the subject from that which threatens it, on the contrary, it declares it [the subject] in perpetual danger.
- 7 In monotheistic religions, she notices that transgression is associated with sin, as in the Christian verb. In Occidental modernity there is a return to the archaic resonance of the Biblical text, and, further back, to the concept of pollution in primitive cultures. The symbolic construction is based on the formation of the other: "... 'sujet' et 'objet' se repoussent, s'affrontent, s'effrontent et repartent, inséparables, contaminés, condamnés,

à la limite de l'assimilable, du pensable: abjects" (... 'subject' and 'object' repel each other, confront each other, collapse, and set off again inseparable, contaminated, at the limit of what can be assimilated, at the limit of the thinkable: abject).<sup>6</sup>

- 8 Viruses and microbes are an important part of this 'scientific' framework and ideology as carriers of infection and disease. Their specific quality as parasitical micro-organisms, (metaphorically) infiltrating and menacing the healthy body of the nation or a community, is all the more threatening for being invisible and in constant metamorphosis.<sup>7</sup>
- 9 The array of scientific and symbolic terms used – infection, contagion, invasion, spread, proximity – is often borrowed to indicate strangers and outsiders. Against them disinfectants and eradications become walls and barriers that must be erected as means of restoring good health. Viruses leaping the species are a direct threat to our 'species' – white, human, civilized – from which the unscientific concept of race rises as a ghost. Infections associated with the other, whether African or Asian or animal, refugee or terrorist, ignore borders and invade the civilized world. Blackness becomes an issue, and so do different skin and features. This is what is occurring right now with the rise of White Panic that considers migrations as a disease, accompanied by fears of a spreading, proliferating, multiplying mass. Material walls are being erected all over our planet.

## Illusions of Neutrality

- 10 Iain Chambers refers this discussion to the historical and epistemological framework of colonial regimes entwined in the subsequent developments of the neoliberalist economy. He calls for a different critical language as a challenge to western unilateralism, "... an assemblage of knowledge and practices that historically participated directly and indirectly in the hierarchisation and consequent racialization of the planet, via the violent imposition of Western capital in its management of planetary resources".
- 11 He describes the hypocrisy of neutrality in Western thought at length, a line that is taken up in many of the subsequent essays. Within a Foucaultian framework, Chambers maintains that science ought to offer a discontinuity with the dominant vision of time and history. The existing disciplinary discourse should take into account important 'voices', such as those of Franz Fanon, James Baldwin, Angela Davis and Nina Simone.
- 12 Gregory Lee traces links between science and colonialism in the formation of a racial ideology over the last 200 years. Returning to the Victorian era, he traces the formation of a xenophobic discourse in the links between nineteenth-century anthropology and the rise of an imperial frame of thought in Britain. He underlines that, alongside the African and the Chinese, the Irish were at the bottom of the colonial hierarchy. The anti-Irish discourse found a powerful correlative in animal imagery, with the representations of the Irish gorilla, the Monkey, aimed also at confirming the superiority of the English as the epitome of the human. He notices that racial considerations passed before capitalist interest, limiting immigrant intake in spite of very low local nativity rate; conditions that are reproduced today in the arguments and the strategies to curb migrations.
- 13 We encounter here the basis for the expulsion of difference, whether physical, mental, sexual or ethnic, leading to reclusion and incarceration in securitized spaces. The scientific establishment of mental institutions is a major example of relocating mental and sexual disorder out of sight. It has been described in many literary works from the

Victorian period down to the present. Two major examples here are Jack London's *The Star Rover* (1915) and Madge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Both narrate the alliance between 'scientific' systems of cure in mental institutions and the attendant imprisonment of those who fall out of socially accepted categories.<sup>8</sup> Angela Davis, in much of her work, has consistently denounced the majority presence of black people, and the conditions they face, in USA gaols. Both medical health and judicial systems concur in guaranteeing the repression of diversity.

- 14 In her essay in this volume, Florence Labaune-Demeule, looks at mental disease and 'disease disorders' in colonial and postcolonial situations. This is represented in two novels, V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) and Abha Dawesar's *Family Values* (2009). Her analyses locates them in the frame of (post)colonial trauma, referring to the literature on medical colonial discourse and imagery, particularly in relation to the imperial medical system in British India. "Biswas's mental breakdown has to be understood not just as any breakdown but as the consequence of the colonial system's attempt at submitting any desire for personal independence and rebellion against colonial power and domination").
- 15 Both novels deal with the opposition between rational, aseptic Western-style medical practices and traditional Indian therapies. The antagonism and mixture of the two are the emblem of a society in constant flux between the influence of Occidental ways and the rituals and lore of its own culture, perched as it is on the cusp between modernity and tradition. Naipaul's novel provides an image of illness operating in a contradictory role; on one side as the metaphor of colonial rule and on the other of rebellion and independence from it: materially represented in the profusion and accumulation of bottles and drugs of diverse origins on the same table in the house. In both novels houses are microcosms in which the two worlds are reflected, and somehow interact, as in *Family Values* where the thin partition between the private space and the medical practice room is a partial filter between two worlds, separate but in constant communication.
- 16 Amrita Ghosh again reads the link between an infectious disease and Eastern otherness in Mann's *Death in Venice*; that great story of European decadence and death. The stigma and the fascination of alterity is expressed in the description of a luxuriant natural landscape, in the nostalgia for a primordial wilderness.<sup>9</sup> In Ghosh's analysis, the trope of cultural and ethnic difference emerges through referencing medical systems: "Venice, in Mann's text, becomes a liminal space that opens up to a "contact" with the East – within this space two binaries are set up – the sanitized trope of the West against the source of unclean bodies in the East". Venice, as the more 'amiable' South, stands as a liminal zone between the West and the dangerous East, from which the epidemic has spread, though in reality, as Ghosh underlines, infections and diseases often moved in the opposite direction, from West to East.
- 17 Cholera works as the symbolic representation of difference: "how meanings of diseases become projected onto the world" as Susan Sontag puts it in *Illness as Metaphor*. It enables a discourse that sees the colonized space as a space of disorder, needing the supervision of modern medicine. The opposition of a tropical world as primitive and dangerous to a sanitized [European] world was at the basis of the emergent Nineteenth-century medical science. In reality, British doctors borrowed heavily from Indian medicinal practices in prescribing similar drugs. In the end, germs, viruses and infections stand for miniature representations of the ills affecting the Indian macrocosm.
- 18 In "Transcultural Psychiatry and French Provision of Health for Migrants", Dafne Accoroni looks at a similar opposition in our times and our part of the world. She sees it

in the gap between the French healthcare system and the Muslim population of migrants in France. She references ethnopsychiatry as a discipline formed at the end of the last century as a way of solving the 'African problem' in postcolonial times. In the case studies she analyses as a participant observer, Accoroni finds that attention to the cultural and religious background of the patients would be of help but is rarely found in state institutional practices of assistance to migrants.

## 'The Thing from Another World'

- 19 For a long time popular genres have been inspired by the fear of biological and chemical contagion, of something impalpable and invisible that like smoke – sometimes smoke itself – passes borders, frontiers, walls. This has become an obsession today, from the USA to Israel and Fortress Europe. In the fifties and sixties American sci-fi films portrayed these threatening entities sometime taking over our own bodies and infiltrating them from the inside. Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1958) is a sort of model and inspiration of a theme that, in many variations, has become a staple metaphor in horror and fantasy cinema, from *Alien* (1979), by now a classic with its many sequels and remakes, to recent Netflix productions. In *Annihilation* (2018), the monstrous entity remains obscure and more threatening because it is invisible and ghost-like.<sup>10</sup>
- 20 It is precisely a 'ghost', somebody coming from the other world, that appears consistently in Johan Höglund's analysis of the South Korean film *Train to Busan* (2016), a recent example of a zombie movie. Commencing from George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) with its many sequels and remakes, this genre has epitomised the fear of the other, in this case of the undead. The zombie is a revenant, the one who comes from the realm of the dead, spreading death as a contagion, a mutant moving between two states, a motif recurrent in other horror genres such as vampire tales and ghost stories. In this case, the violent visual image of flesh-eating evokes more materially the attack on our body, and hence the pandemic fear of contagious diseases, cholera, the plague, smallpox. The zombie can also be understood as the vengeful subaltern which, according to Höglund, entails a combined focus on race and class.
- 21 In Romero's first film, the main character was a black man in a group of white, bourgeois individuals who were all subsequently devoured by the zombies. The political undertones are evident. The black character survives the zombies just to be shot by mistake by white 'rescuers' at the end. Something that is still happening to black people in the USA today. He was originally scripted as a truck-driver though during the filming his working-class origin faded. In *Train to Butan*, the crossing of class borders finds a concrete visual representation, as Höglund points out, in the transformation of the middle-class characters "succumbing to a pandemic disease, rising again in the shape of the utterly tattered poor, and joining the growing pack of similarly destitute zombies that roam a crumbling metropole". Class and ethnicity, though never too far from race, are crucial components of the exclusion or segregation in this genre; the zombie is a creature outside modernity, like most of the homeless inhabiting our cities, in the more or less advanced world, whether in Santa Cruz, California, or Naples, Italy, or like the immigrant consigned to so-called 'temporary' camps.
- 22 While Romero's film created a polarity between two spaces, the graveyard as the realm of death, and the house as a temporary shelter for the living, the train here is a unity

between the two. It is an ambiguous space of both salvation and perdition, a mobile enclave evoking the image of the nation, a threatened enclosed space, allegory and metaphor for purity and wholeness, designed on the basis of its capacity of exclusion.<sup>11</sup> It is here that an outsider, a young Asian woman, enters as the initial contagious agent, challenging the boundary between health and illness, security and danger, exhibited through a dramatic corporeal metamorphosis into the diseased Other. In this case gender alongside race is the cause of havoc.

- 23 Gender is, in fact, a crucial determinant in the representations of such others. The horror genre, from literature to cinema, associates the theme of sex, violence and death with women, while underlining their insatiable sexual drive, their proximity to the animal world, their inordinate lesbian desire.<sup>12</sup> It was a woman vampire created by Sheridan Le Fanu in *Carmilla*, who gave rise to the theme of the lesbian double.<sup>13</sup> The double Carmilla-Laura reproduces the one created by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Christabel* (1799-1800), where the dove Christabel is under the spell of the magician Geraldine, a lost damsel with serpent's eyes, a double herself. Laura is similarly defenceless faced with Carmilla's enchantments; in both cases the spell is a mixture of fear and attraction, the matter of lesbian love. After defeating her with the help of her father, she goes back to a quiet life with him though still recalling her luscious black hair and desiring her return – each part of the double, vampire and victim, is just as duplicitous.
- 24 This motif returns in Neil Jordan's remake of Bram Stoker's *Dracula: Interview with the Vampire* (1994). Here the male double finds a counterbalance in the vampiric little girl, first a victim and then, as an adult, a powerful lesbian antagonist. The rich popular subgenre of the many versions centred on Dracula's brides and daughters finds an ironic exception in Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* (1994) where the women who spread the contagion in a literary department of a North American university use postmodern philosophy as the carrier. It is also a sarcastic comment on a certain kind of academic vampirism.
- 25 As Julia Kristeva notes, pollution was linked with woman in the Bible, where the parallel is often made between the impure maternal body and the dying, leprous body. She returns to Douglas's notion of dirt as the fallen object beyond a limit – spit, blood, excrements, urine, milk, tears – and the margin. The liminal line is the body and its contaminated objects. "L'excrément et ses équivalents (pourriture, infection, maladie, cadavre, etc.) représentent le danger venu de l'extérieur de l'identité: le moi menacé par du non-moi, la société menacée par son dehors, la vie par la mort."<sup>14</sup>
- 26 The link between abjection and the female body is tied to that between abjection and the maternal body, to the fear of the archaic mother, of her generative power. Menstrual blood represents the danger arriving from inside and threatens both social and sexual mores. This is a leitmotif of horror and sci-fi films. Both the *Alien* spaceship saga, from Ridley Scott to James Cameron, and David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) are good examples of an ambiguous vision of maternal horrific power.
- 27 Florence Labaune-Demeule refers to colonialism transposing such images to those of the colonies as gendered bodies that can be submitted to different forms of ills – the female body of the colony being subservient to the male power of Empire associated with the figure of the master or the rapist, thus combining political or social violence with physical abuse. Johan Höglund refers mortal pandemics such as avian flu, H1N1, and Ebola, to the "age of terrorism", seeing in the figure of the zombie an effective merging with that of the terrorist. Western society itself, with its reliance on white masculinity

and the uncritical belief in modernity, turns out to be the real horror that produces the illness. This latter possibility is clearly discernible in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and in much of the late director's other works. Höglund's analysis shows how it re-surfaces in interesting ways in *Train to Busan*.

## Diasporic Diseases

- 28 Many of the essays in this volume refer to migration. In the present conjuncture, the migrant, any migrant (though some are in a worse situation than others), is represented as a menace, promoting a universalized 'white panic'. Iain Chambers evokes the island of Lampedusa, in the extreme south of Italy, a small piece of land where the contradictions and limits of European modernism are exposed in the proximity of shipwrecked and illegal migrants with tourists, many of whom come from that northern part of Italy that today votes for a xenophobic party. "Today, the multiple souths of the planet infiltrate the modernity that seeks to consign their histories to silence, transforming certain human beings into 'illegal' objects of our jurisdiction." On the other hand, the Mediterranean has long been the scene of waves of emigration from the South to the North of Europe and America. Chambers invites us to think not *of* but *with* migration, using it as a critical instrument to look at the world we live in and at its continuity with a colonial past based on a racial and racist subordination of the rest of the world.
- 29 Postcolonial art has recently looked to Lampedusa and similar sites in the Mediterranean. Two examples come to my mind, Isaac Julien's *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007) and Zineb Sedira's, *Floating Coffins* (2009). The audiovisual installation by Julien, who is a black British artist of Jamaican descent based in London, looks at the traces left on Lampedusa by the thousands who have drowned attempting this passage.
- 30 The Sicilian channel is only one of these 'southern theatres' of migration: from Lampedusa to the Canary islands and the beaches of Morocco. The Franco-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira focuses her film on other scenes of mobility and displacement. Her recent work, *Floating Coffins* (2009), was filmed on the coasts of Mauritania where 'the desert meets the sea', in a space for abandoned and wrecked ships (not unlike Julien's long initial sequence on broken boats in Lampedusa), a sort of graveyard of broken dreams (of the migrants, of the West and its progress?) and at the same time a source for survival and hope.
- 31 In both cases alternative ways of looking at migration are considered: in *Western Union* by the apparently incongruous presence of a black androgynous witness, of her body and look, and in *Floating Coffins* by someone in Arab clothes observing this ruined archive of colonialism – both as the remembrance of other systems of colonial oppression and slavery, whether in Jamaica or Algeria.
- 32 From visual art to literature, we find many examples that offer an alternative look on migration, one from the other side. Sophie Coavoux adds this further dimension with her analysis of queer post-migratory literature through the writings of Christos Tsiolkas, an Australian writer of Greek heritage, 'a suffering body, lost in translation', as she says. She derives from Salman Rushdie the definition of 'translated objects', while also referring to Stuart Hall's notion of 'cultures of hybridity'. Hall underlined that cultural identities are both fluid and mixed, and ethnicity is a process of struggle and negotiation, crossed by



differences. Cultural diaspora-ization is for him a process “of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and cut-and-mix”.<sup>15</sup>

- 33 ‘Translated objects’ is a term that applies to most migrant writings constantly translating the memory of other places, cultures, worlds into another language. Among them are writers in Italian who are African or Afro-descendant, whose works are examples of translation or self-translation, often an invisible, immaterial translation; not only of language, but also of geography, history, culture.<sup>16</sup> The oscillation of identities is the basis of these translational processes inducing similar ones in the reader.
- 34 In the twilight area between sanity and dementia, the same and the other, Tsiolkas’ works offer a rethinking of diversity within the framework of multicultural Australia, a mix of multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious people of hybrid origins who find themselves alongside the few surviving Aboriginals and the many Anglo-Australians. He speaks of *xenitia*, an ambiguous concept that captures the feeling of exile and isolation as the inherited burden of second generation migrants; living as a stranger in a foreign land is specifically weighed in his case by mental and sexual diversity.
- 35 In one of his novels the ‘in-between-ness’ of the vampire returns as a symbol of a being who is neither here nor there, describing, against the blanket category of migrant literature, “a queer kind of belonging”: “Homosexuality is a sickness. So, probably, being hetero. Being black is a sickness, so too is being white”. His characters, mostly gay men, have internalized ‘the sense of inferiority’, of which Frantz Fanon speaks, and introjected the racism and the hate of which they have been the object. Fanon gave an important contribution to the psychopathology of colonialism, following his experience as a doctor and a psychiatrist both in France and Algeria. In *Peau noire masques blancs* (1952), he writes of the interstitial space between the colonizer and the colonized, the psychic uncertain area between race and sexuality, black and white.
- 36 In Tsiolkas’ case, hate and self-hate pervade everything to the point of xenophobic insults; his self-representation leads to the assumption of the stereotype of hypersexual Mediterranean men. Here it is briefly fitting to refer to the role of medicine in the definition of lesbian, homosexuals and, above all, trans as wrong bodies. The contagious view of sexual difference has found a medical and symbolic expression in the stigma of Aids, seen as both a social and moral transgression.<sup>17</sup>
- 37 In conclusion, I would like to recall Lynn Margulis’ concept of ‘the intimacy of strangers’ as the most fundamental practice of becoming-with each other in earth’s history. Her ‘holobionts’ are the encounter and the result of host and hosted micro-organisms, including viruses, all becoming one and symbionts to one another.<sup>18</sup> We should look at migrancy as a sympoietic condition connecting the present of the passage to the past of origins, and to the aspiration of the future, making subjectivity a complex contested process that involves the social and the psychic, the conscious and the unconscious. The already existing confrontation with alterity is more urgent today. Migration is not a new phenomenon in human history but today it gives rise to a new order of instability in the production of deterritorialized subjectivities. It cannot be read in a univocal manner. Hospitality if unconditioned may create a new vital assemblage in which them and us are simultaneously diverse and the same.
- 38 Jacques Derrida observed that in some languages, such as Italian and French, the word for host and guest, is the same, and that, even when there are two as in English, they are reversible, as in Freud’s *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. The inversion of the two makes each

hostage of the other; such is the law of hospitality. The expression 'la question de l'étranger' must be read above all as a question/request coming from the stranger "...the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question."<sup>19</sup> In *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), Kristeva writes that the stranger as the hidden face of our identity commences with the conscience of our difference and concludes once we acknowledge ourselves as strangers and rebels.

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## NOTES

1. 'Filthiness itself is hardly a representation which itself is drowned in a specific fear occluding reflection ; with filthiness we enter into the reign of terror.' *Editor's translation*.
2. Important re-readings of evolutionism have recently come from feminist philosophy. See Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2004. New work in the field of biology, ecology, and anthropology has likewise put into question past certainties, from Lynn Margulis and Donna Haraway to Anna Tsing and James Clifford.
3. See Lynn Margulis, *Symbolic Planet. A New Look at Evolution*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1998.
4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, Pelican Books, 1970 [1966], p. 13. Quotation in epigraph on p. 16.
5. *Pouvoir de l'horreur*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1980, p. 9 and p. 17. Within an overall appreciation of Douglas's work, she regrets her lack of reference to the subjective dimension in the symbolic systems, that seems to her a deep and originary causal element (see p. 81). *Editor's translation*.
6. Kristeva, p. 25. Such is the foundation of most modern literature, from Dostoyevsky to Proust, Artaud, Kafka, Céline.... *Editor's translation*.
7. In "The Gaia Hypothesis" (1974), Lovelock and Margulis proposed a view of the planet as a super-organism based on biodiversity and evolving on a system of feedback, a systemic force that Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret, in *Les faiseuses d'histoires. Que font les femmes à la pensée?* (2011), interestingly see as a 'mystery' exceeding human reason and scientific thought.
8. There are numerous famous films and TV series on this argument. A recent example is that of *Orange is the New Black*. Commencing from its title, blackness is associated with the real colour of American jails. In the series, secluded diversity is interestingly represented both in ethnic and sexual terms.
9. The deep ambiguity of the colonizer for the colonized country has been underlined by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, p. 162), where he refers to Kipling and his romanticized vision of India. In his opinion this is an extreme example of orientalism, "a cinematic version of the Indian sublime". In *White Teeth* (2000), Zadie Smith observes: "... the English loved India, and Africa and Ireland, and love was the problem" (p. 361). In a different way, Mann's protagonist is torn by this ambiguous love and dies of it.
10. In this film, the menace takes the shape of a ferocious killing animal or of a beautiful flowering bush, at one time external entities and metamorphosed shapes for the self, until the final one where the apparently untouched self of the two survivors is totally occupied by another, reminding us of the emotionless duplicates first seen in Siegel's film. Different interpretation can be given of who this other may be, perhaps the 'disease of our times', cancer,

or the ethnic other or most probably the many components of new technologies – certainly it is invasive and aggressive and, as of usual, comes from elsewhere.

11. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948-1976), Hannah Arendt saw the dangers involved in the formation of nation-states: “sovereignty is nowhere more absolute than in matters of emigration, naturalization, nationality and expulsion” (New York, Schocken Books, 2004, p. 354). Being founded on a notion of purity and wholeness, every national formation leads to exclusion and statelessness in order to legitimize itself. It creates a series of stateless subjects, as Judith Butler says: “...those who are incarcerated, enslaved, or residing and labouring illegally... contained within the polis as its interiorized outside” (*Who sings the nation-state?*, London, Seagull Books, 2007, p. 16). Migrants do not find a space, whether material or mental, in the processes of national formations.

12. Not by chance are horror films of the 1950s and 1960s are centered on monstrous women, such as *Wasp-Women*, *Cat-Women*, or *The Woman who is Fifty Yards Tall*.

13. It reappears in the remakes, Roger Vadims’s *Et mourir de plaisir* (1961) and Roy Baker’s *The Vampire Lovers* (1970).

14. Kristeva, p. 86.

15. Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities”, *Anglistica*, Vol. 1, 1, 1992, p. 22. He defines the diasporic space as a “syncretic dynamic” set in motion by de-colonization and global migration, adding that the ‘post’ in postcolonial is not so much what comes ‘after’ as the *aftermath* of colonization/ decolonization pushing people into exile due to poverty and hunger, civil war, illness, ecological disaster or political persecution. In her ‘cartographies of intersectionality’, Avtar Brah extends the issue of diaspora specifically to transnational feminism and the necessary intersection of gender, race, class and generation. See *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contested Identities*, Routledge, London, 1996.

16. They are mostly coming from the ex-Italian colonies in North and East Africa. Among them, Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, Gabriella Ghermandi, Igiaba Scego. Their language is always traversed by the presence of indigenous African words (mostly referring to material objects, food, smells, customs, tastes) as well as by the echoes of syntax, images, sounds from ancestral poems. The co-presence of two or more languages, of two or more mothers, is a constant stylistic character.

17. In *Antigone’s Claim* (2000), Judith Butler has written of the impossibility of mourning for those killed by Aids, and in *Precarious Lives* (2004), of the divide between the lives worth saving and those who are not, recalling Emmanuel Lévinas’ notion of ethics as founded on the ‘precarity of life commencing with the Other’s precarious life’.

18. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway recalls that “the core of Margulis’s view of life was that new *kinds* of cells, tissues, organs and species evolve primarily through the long-lasting intimacy of strangers” (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 60). Haraway’s book is a sustained comment on how such vital symbiogenetic assemblages are extended to the lively arts, in particular to women’s sci-fi speculative literature.

19. J. Derrida, *Of Hospitality. Anne Dufourmantlle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, Stanford, CA, Stanford Univeristy Press, 2000, p. 3. The question of the stranger is intolerable as s/he is a stranger to language, law, ethics. Further ambiguity comes from the Latin ‘hostis’, which is also the root of ‘hostility’.

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### LIDIA CURTI

Lidia Curti, Honorary Professor of English at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", is a cultural critic and a feminist. Among her books: *Female stories, female bodies* (Macmillan 1998), *La voce dell'altra* (Meltemi 2006, republished 2018), *The postcolonial question* (with I. Chambers, Routledge 1996), *La nuova Shahrazad* (2004), *Shakespeare in India* (2010). Her present interests are Italian diasporic literature, migration in artistic practices and counter-genealogies in feminist contemporary theory. Among her recent publications: "Transcultural itineraries" (*Feminist Review* 2011); "Voices of a Minor Empire," in *The Cultures of Italian Migration* (Farleigh Dickinson 2011); "Dreaming in afro: Stuart Hall on black art" (*Estetica* 2015); "The House of Difference: Bodies, Genres, Genders" (*de genere* 2015); "Literary Citizenship and Migrating Belongings" in *Postcolonial Matters* (Unipress 2015); "Il soggetto imprevisto. Simone de Beauvoir tra femminismo e postcoloniale" in *Genealogie della modernità* (Mimesis, 2017).