

REVIEWS

Zeb Tortorici. *Sins Against Nature. Sex and archives in colonial New Spain*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2018, 327 pp.

The relationship between the 'desire', between the desiring passions or between the gradients of emotionality and motility of the body and the historical archive, especially the colonial one, has always been -to use a euphemism- very 'complicated'. If in Europe, both in the pre - and the post- Reformation period, the administration of the 'spirit' was firmly in the hands of the Church, and was meticulously articulated through the various modes of confession and the different practices of discipline and neutralization - the Foucaultian work of the 1970s on social disciplines develops from the analysis of the general economy of penance and forgiveness, in colonial spaces these same practices assembled together ecclesiastical courts and tribunals, banning *de facto* sexual behaviors and desires not aligned with the 'reproductive' needs of the empire nor those exceeding the dictum Religious: Forced conversion and slave accumulation are contiguous and inseparable events in colonial possessions, and the body of the colonized-slave had to be smooth surface of inscription of the relations of domination and identities elsewhere built.

The research of Zeb Tortorici -subject of this text- aims to dig into the archives of New Spain, corresponding today to Mexico, Guatemala, the South-West

United States and the Philippines, to bring out the presence of these 'subversive' desires for the colonial moral order, considered unnatural because it exceeds the norm of gender. From the methodological point of view, it is a work that assumes in full the invisibility of these expressions of an extra-normative sexuality, which makes precisely the Derridian concept of '*trace*' as irreducible otherness to the present, therefore as *un-reachable historicity* according to the dominant orders of speech, thus implied by them but exceeding them too under specific conditions.

Thus, following this indication, the author points to the '*mutilated historicity*' of the colonial archives especially with regard to these forms of sexuality, and highlights its '*viscerality*', i.e. the sinful and carnal inclination, the lens under which it is inscribed in the archives and deprived of their own 'stories', embodied in singular biographies and particular acts: according to the Mbembe's concept of '*necropolitique*', the archive is a graveyard of infamous lives and experiences, but that simultaneously attempt to remove them leaves a mark, albeit imperceptible.

The American scholar follows these invisible traces, bringing to light the existence of other forms of desire and sexuality through the categories used to repress them: first, what he calls 'empty archive of colonial sexuality' is structured on the base of an absolute genderization of the body of the reo, such as to punish not so much the homosexual desire in itself but the

becoming-feminine of the male body, therefore the passivity as a demeaning state of a colonized male sexuality that, through Stoler and Wallace, has historically been built as mighty and dominant to dominate the same Western and colonial eroticism. The specific act of sodomy, therefore, is accepted in its positive sense as an activity of penetration, and deplored in its constitution of specific desire, ascertained through specific medical practices able to identify the body of the guilty and of classify it as such. The taxonomy of the bodies rests on a '*connotational positioning*' dependent on eye evidence, then by the observant participation of a third figure during the act considered unnatural and contrary, so sexuality is used as a prism capable of work along the sexual division (and gender, *ça va sans dire!*), building sexual identities as elements detached from real events. Thus, 'bestiality, not as an element of exotic construction of desire but as evidence of the aberration of the colonized, is constructed as a test through the comparison between the subject itself and the animal, thus postulating irrationality and the degradation of the body as a sign of a typically indigenous crime, a pity that was felt not only on defenceless men and women but also on animals, citing as causes alcoholism or the absence of certain norms and family hierarchies.

The comparison with today's xenophobia, with the almost pornographic fear of the sexuality of migrants, and with the projection of new neo-colonial and typically *Wasp* sexual fantasies, exotic fantasies that move along the line of color, which produce meta-identitarian stereotypes such as the power of the male body or the sinuousness of the female body, remaining anchored to a symbolic order however phallocentric. If, therefore, this (movement of) excess enters the archive (and the real) through an operation of historical '*voyeurism*', the author attempts to force its access by collecting the affective signs that reside in it: paraphrasing Bersani, the archive (like the rectum) is a tomb because it collects the slightest traces of what has passed in it, allowing the construction of a counter-remembrance of carnal alterations and indigenous desirable practices without the burden of colonial justice. Considering that the colonial justice itself for these charges provided for death or forced labor, it is curious and interesting at the same time the focus that

Tortorici devotes to the latent desire of missionaries and men of the Church, both in the forms of 'embodied traces' contained in confessional archives and colonial confession manuals, both in the heretical forms of what the author calls the 'desire of the Divine', i.e. acts of ecstatic pollution and fornication involving biblical and trinitarian elements: the 'double speed' of the judicial and ecclesiastical administration was limited to consider these same acts as fetish products of a private nature, denying their latent carnality, at most attributable to unwritten practices of the process of elevation of the colonized to the *stralia* of Colonial Reason.

In conclusion, Tortorici's work is a useful methodological and historical piece of what can be a subordinate history, through the use of *dispositif-sexuality* as an internal limit to historical reconstructions, as an element of intellect of the practices of submission to the imperial theological-political coercion, and as an element of discrimination between the body of the settler, a form blessed by divine power, and the impure and animalistic one of the colonized, which had to deny - even through the strength of others - one's own nature in order to have access to the parole (always through the other people's language) and therefore to historical memory. But, as Gramsci taught, the stories of subordinates are *flatus vocis*, fragmented and episodic voices that can only emerge by bringing to light the traces hidden among the folds of official historical and colonial productions, making visible the aspirations and the existing and silent dynamics behind the stigma of unspeakable desires and unrepresentable conflicts. (Vincenzo Maria Di Mino).

B. De Sousa Santos, *The End Of Cognitive Empire*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2018, 376 pp.

The red thread that organically binds the work of the Portuguese jurist Boaventura De Sousa Santos, observing it by this last work, is certainly the formation, trans-disciplinary and geographically dispersed, of a specific voice and grammar for the South, local and global, and of the subjectivity that through this geographical location set up political and discursive paths aimed at their emancipation.

In fact, the slippage of the South from a mere geographical category, with disciplinary twists and identity representations linked to the broader elaborations related to meta-significant 'underdevelopment' and the implications produced by it also in the field of theory 'progressive' policy, for example the dilemma on 'dependence' and diatribes about national stages of development with the consequent 'revolutionary' choices, finds its fulfilment in the courageous enterprise of a real 'Southern epistemology', that is, a 'scientific' grammar with which to express tensions, desires, paths and struggles of the South as a global category.

While the author's work on the basis of the '*glocal*' movements that characterised the first round of mobilizations against neo-liberal globalisation, between Genoa and the World Forums in Porto Alegre, tended towards the legal and political empowerment of the local power nodes, in terms of greater participation of that vast segment of 'subalterns' most affected by economic inequalities (and why not environmental) to collective decision-making processes (participatory budgets, restorative justice), the development of a speech with 'epistemic' outlines takes the work itself to the next level, not any more than mere representation but concrete expression of the global multitudes, embodying its 'cannibal' and 'wild' nature but not without philosophical foundations that can allow them to rewrite their own stories and, consequently, to enhance their agencies.

Going into detail, *strictu sensu* the volume title, continuing the discourse that began with the eponymous 'Epistemologies of South', implicitly refers us to the subtitle of this: 'justice against epistemicide': the cognitive empire that it recalls is what has made epistemicide and extermination, returns of the eternal topicality of colonialism, practices of subjugation of the fragmented diversity of the Global South.

The abyss from which De Sousa Santos brings out his intuitions emerge is precisely that of the colonial knowledge and its authorial joints, represented by the archival modes of mainstream historical narrative, of the representation two-dimensional of subjectivity- along the axes traced by the so-called 'Cartesian subject' synthesis of body and spirit-and by the limitation of the historical experience of the colonized.

What is highlighted in fact are the orality and the intrinsic corporality of knowledge, their inseparability from the experiences of self-determination and the constant search for autonomy from the links of the constituted power: with the lemma '*corazonar*', in fact, the author expresses this specific relational declination of knowledge as a bridge between cogito, emotions and the body.

The post-abysmal methodology, therefore, is intimately decolonial and theme of the extractive nature of political and economic devices, but declining it in an immediately '*biopolitical*' key, in the wake of authors such as Raul Zibechi: if extractivism describes a set of economic practices characterized by the violent dispossession and appropriation of natural resources, these same practices are extended to the colonization of the imaginary and the life forms themselves.

From this point of view, the ecological rethinking of the production of knowledge is placed on the level of existence and resistance of subjectivity, as a specific product of a specific point of view not reducible to the pacified 'complexity' of the academy nor to governance. Thus, through a global constellation of authors and historical figures (Martí, Bolívar, Guevara, Manichù, Ghandi) we arrive at the pedagogical declination of this discursive regime, showing the necessary conscience of the processes of subjectivation that become necessary for the Global Souths' '*prise de parole*'. The author treasures the work of Paulo Freire and the pedagogy of the oppressed, rereading it in the light of the proposal of a sociology of absences, the spectrality of subordinates in historical narratives and their powerful need for existence beyond the archive networks and the historical monuments.

The Indigenous historical power needs its own practical translation through participatory research operations, of con-research, which De Sousa Santos finds in the Zapatista uprising of Chiapas that began in 1994, which, by dislodging the dichotomy between violence and violence and violence to an immediately communicative level, representing the counter-hegemonic nature of its struggle by translating the '*low*' knowledges through the '*mythopoiesis*' that belongs to the '*high*' knowledges- the spectre of Zapata who still rode alongside the insurgents, the '*caminar domando*' of international caravans, the '*caracoles*' and

the *'junta of buen gobierno'* of the Indios- allowing the hybrid productivity of the assemblies between metropolitan and rural experiences to be expressed, complicating their links and making their political 'polyphonies' operational: the experience of oppression, so re-read, is itself hope for redemption and emancipation from authoritarian colonialism and progressive and liberal post-developmentalism. So it should not sound strange the final proposal of the author, who does not close the speech but relaunches it as an 'open source' platform, of a *'pluriversity'* that takes the place of the classic academic institution and its devices of power- authorship, meritocracy, exclusion, actuarial and economicist evaluation- or, rather, a *'subversity'*, a performative machine of subordinate and southern know-how, that adopts the cognitive practices articulated by De Sousa Santos and turn into a vector of a new political and geographical connection between the different South, not in terms of identity or simplistically in terms of mutual aid, but in terms of shared knowledge and resistance to expropriative and proletarianized dynamics.

In the wake of a practice that is made theory and a theory that gets mestizo, the volume helps us to re-think the antagonistic practices and the positioned ways of research within the new great transformation that shakes the globe, allowing us to know the Other- specifically address the migrant tragedy that is shaking the West and the nationalist and authoritarian folds that are taking the answers to it - by de-colonizing and subverting and subverting Western intellectual primacy, deconstructing identity and essentialism, and helping to recognize the enemy- the ruling ghost of the *'tous-ensemble'* and the *'soft'* or armed colonizer- in all forms in which it continues to show up. (Vincenzo Maria Di Mino).

A.A. Ferrante, *Pelle queer maschere straight. il regime di visibilità omonormativo oltre la televisione*, Milan, Mimesis, 2019, 163 pp.

It's been one of the great ideological triumphs of AIDS activism that, for a whole series of overlapping communities, any person living with AIDS is now vis-

ible, not only as someone dealing with a particular, difficult cluster of pathogens, but equally as someone who is by that very fact defined as a victim of state violence. What needs to happen now [...] is the even more radical and shaming realization that [...] every experience of illness is, among other things, a subjection to state violence, and where possible to be resisted as that (Sedgwick 1993, 262).

By the time Eve K. Sedgwick wrote the passage above, the vehement reactions from the general public and the U.S. government to the AIDS pandemic had only intensified the sense of threat to the social order allegedly posed by mostly non-heterosexual communities. Sedgwick's words often came to mind while reading Antonia Anna Ferrante's *Pelle queer maschere straight. Il regime di visibilità omonormativo oltre la televisione* (Queer Skin, Straight Mask. The Homonormative Regime of Visibility Beyond the TV), in which this transfeminist queer activist scholar traces the emergence of a «homonormative regime of visibility [...] to describe the mainstream trajectory of homosexualities within a culturally and politically hegemonic regime» (2019, 29). To accomplish this task, she unpacks the category of kinship in order to recast the family «as an oppositional space, complicit in the creation-destruction of power relationships in society» (ibidem, 21). The spectre of AIDS looms over several cultural texts and contexts discussed in this challenging book. However, my connections between the (queer) past and the present which open this review comment Ferrante's attempt «to make space for intimacies outside the dictates of private life, of normality, and of cultural acceptability» (ibidem, 24). This is particularly significant when queer gender studies in a post-LGBT human rights age still too often overlook such a crucial moment in queer histories.

Pelle queer maschere straight explores relational ethics of care, affect, and love. It builds a powerful critique of the neo-liberal and neo-colonial/imperial present and of the strategies used by the State to put citizens to work in the service of the hierarchies of class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. The book interrogates different aspects of the mainstreaming of queerness across geographical contexts and the media. Ferrante sees the concept of queer positional-

ity as both «a theoretical space for developing critical perspectives and a tool for performing practices to destabilise identities, epistemologies, and arguably, the family» (Ferrante 2019, 155).

I first came across Ferrante's work while searching for queer feminist interventions in what Lynn Huffer calls «a masculinist universalism at work in the deployment of the seemingly inclusive category of "queer"» (2013, 86), which would offer a combined perspective on queerness and coloniality in Italy. Not long ago, Ferrante gave a lecture to a group of my students. During the lecture, she delved into the colonial archive of 'modern' Italy and the processes of domestication involved in its creation, from the stigmatization of Southern Italians in the XX century through to the present desire of non-heterosexuals for inclusion in the Nation. Her involvement with activist and research networks, like NonUnadiMeno, the SomMovimentonazioAnale, and the TRU-Technoculture Research Unit at the University of Naples 'L'Orientale', inform the examples of «non-traditional terrains of theory-making» that characterise her work (Nicholas 2014, 12). As noted by feminist scholars critiquing the resilience of normativity, experiences of activist work can provide «solution based, real world practices that have occurred in communities and groups of people as means of moving ideals forward» (ibidem; my emphasis).

From this perspective, the opening Teaser in Ferrante's militant book thrusts readers into the uncomfortable sensation of feeling stuck between the articulation of loss and the desire to build new worlds. Coming to terms with a personal loss, she articulates her desire for connection by reading with and beside Judith Butler, Anne Cvetkovich, Michel Foucault, Donna J. Haraway, and Sedgwick:

In relationships there is a primordial instinct, borne out of a desire, but also from a need for mutual recognition and to be seen by others – not least the need to feel protected [...] that which continues to be the disturbing element of relationships is the constraints imposed by a collective sense of responsibility, where one can maintain autonomy while being able to trust (ibidem, 25).

In this analysis of kinship structures, strictures, and potentials, queerness is used as a tool to «destabilize categories (and positions)» (Di Felicianantonio 2015, 428) – for thinking, loving, and living life «within a counter-state» (Ferrante 2019, 25). Wishing to follow Ferrante along the «meridian margin to challenge the homonormative regime of visibility» (ibidem, 33), I will here propose some points of entry into her exploration both of the norms reinforcing this space, and of the spaces of resistance available to the contemporary LGBTQIA+ mediated subjects that she helps us see.

Franz Fanon, between "queer skins" and "straight masks"

The title of the book plays with the grammar of decolonial thinking theorised by Franz Fanon. According to Chela Sandoval and her methodology of the oppressed, Fanon's metaphor (in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952) has a two-fold aim: on one hand, it «disrupts the racial binary hierarchy», unsettling its principles and conferring altogether new «unstable meanings» to each term of the binary opposite (white/black). On the other, this metaphor represents «a 'chiasmatic' change of signification [...] by repeating, while simultaneously inverting, the relationship between two concepts» (Sandoval 2000, 84), so that it builds and deconstructs at one and the same time the oppositional logic of race as domain.

Ferrante shifts Fanon's metaphor to the field of norms defining the visible and the invisible to reveal that which exceeds the confines or boundaries of representation. In her case, the injunction to be visible creates a wall, foreclosing relationality. So, the «straight mask» is that worn by homonormative (white) subjects who have fulfilled the demands of capitalism despite themselves, as a «grotesque» citational performance of heteronormativity. The «queer skin» belongs to those «abject subjects» who choose their own tactical practices of self-making, or «autopoiesis», within the context of self-regenerating ideological regimes. This is the skin of the «mostre terrone femminile» who inhabit an in-between space beside new normatives, clustered around the marriage of «queerness» and «Nation» (ibidem, 44). Crucially, Ferrante's use of an Italian phrase that is impossible to translate also holds out the promise of dismantling the cultural and

linguistic foundations of the “Anglo-Saxon norms” of queer theory-making:

The symbol of our time is not that of a reinforced heterosexuality (notwithstanding the efforts made by “anti-gender” crusaders) but rather, it is a proliferation of sexualities imitating, travelling next to, contradicting, and resisting the heterosexual paradigm (43).

Queer transfeminism

In the Teaser, Ferrante clarifies that her interest in ‘radical kinship’ springs from a desire to subvert both the Law of the Father and the «space where there is no safe journey», symbolically represented by the figure of the Mother (2019, 22-23). Her theoretical and activist positioning rejects essentialism and separation in order to embrace coalition, hinting at a space where, drawing from Paul Preciado, «the ex-centric subject meets a queer multitude»:

This multitude is a collective resistance to the discourses and technologies that generate the ‘norm’; it consists of deviant bodies that reclaim the fields of medicine and pornography, while refusing at the same time to build a new politics of identity, destabilising the disciplines of knowledge/power of sex and destroying the possibility of building new normalising tools. This space of the abnormal is a standpoint to question white, colonial, straight history, and even universalism – somersaulting over disciplines (ibidem, 23).

Following on from the ethics of relations theorised by Lauren Berlant, Foucault, Jack Halberstam, and Haraway, Ferrante takes up the invitation to imagine new affective relationships that lie beyond the strictures imposed by interconnected regimes of heterosexuality, whiteness, capitalism, the family, and the state, «whose subversive potential lies in sowing the seeds of love where only the law is supposed to blossom» (ibidem, 24). The fleshing out of the ‘social/anti-social’ dichotomy and related ‘utopian/anti-utopian’ ethical standpoints in queer scholarship has stymied interrogation of the foundation(s) of concepts like ‘antagonism’, ‘the social’, ‘politics’ and ‘utopia’ as they circulate in radical and anti-authoritarian political thought today. Possibly as an unintended consequence, this

dichotomy has re-created a type of binary logic that is anathema to ‘queer’ methodology. This seems to be at stake in Ferrante’s discussion of relationality and in her critique of the ideological systems and institutions that uphold compulsory forms of (non)belonging.

In the chapter entitled *Transparent. Tra gli album di famiglie* (Transparent. Leafing Through Family Albums), the author applies her transfeminist queer approach to the dichotomy of “transparency/opacity”. Opacity is claimed as a «passive right» (ibidem, 56) against the forcefield of representation-representability to discuss three cultural pieces: Jill Soloway’s TV series *Transparent*, which gives the chapter its name, Jean Carlomusto’s documentary *To Catch a Glimpse* (1997), and Sara Davidmann’s art exhibit *Ken. To be Destroyed* (2013). Soloway takes to the screen the failure of the patriarchal mandate, by giving new voice to her father’s coming out as a transwoman. Carlomusto is searching for the ‘truth’ of her grandmother-ghost that haunts her family history. Davidmann is literally taking the story of her transgender uncle out of the box. For all three, the cutting and pasting of family pictures, memories, and relics is an act of subversion against the dysfunctional unity of their families’ past. These acts open up the familial archive to unruly, no-longer-blank spaces in the family album(s), by «seizing [the characters’] opacity to short-circuit the homonormative regime of visibility as the rule of transparency» (Ferrante 2019, 77).

Ferrante’s writing seems to convey an increasing awareness of feminism as a set of embodied sensations one feels when «sitting on the uncomfortable side of the family table» (ibidem). Prompted by Soloway, Carlomusto and Davidmann, she rips up the respectable memories and re-stitches together the more painful ones, thereby re-arranging the intended seating plan to affirm the radical possibilities of silenced, “opaque” (family) narratives. She also pries open the issue of acknowledging the debt owed by queer thinking to transgender and feminist theories. *Pelle queer maschere straight* rejects conceptualisations of queerness as «self-shattering force» (Huffer 2013, 25) in a manner not too dissimilar to revisionist scholarly analyses of the split between feminist and queer theories. In their place, the book insists on sexuality as «a constitutive and forgotten relation to an other»

(ibidem, 33), or as a set of tools to articulate community violence produced by interlocking systems of oppressions. A case in point is the chapter *Dyke is the new black: Visibilità queer dietro le sbarre* (Dyke is the New Black. Queer Visibility Behind Bars), where Ferrante looks at the notion of being «queer behind bars, stuck in between the prison and social expectations» (2019, 80) in the widely acclaimed series by Jenji Leslie Kohan, *Orange is the New Black*.

«Gender discipline is an important example of the relationship that exists between State power and the disciplining of individuals» (ibidem, 84). In this passage, Ferrante draws on the work of Teresa De Lauretis on the technologies of gender and the violence of the institutional(ised) productions of gendered bodies. She shows how this violence is only a permeable wall, demarcating the confines of “inside” and “outside” institutions -- in this case those of the U.S. prison industrial complex. Borrowing from Preciado’s *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018 [2002]) she develops «a contra-sexual exercise», namely, a double-edged argument that insists upon the consensual negotiation of relationships and a more nuanced understanding of power as «counter-productive», not solely oppressive (ibidem, 80) – a tool to read the characters of Sophia Burstett (Laverne Cox) and Carrie “Big Boo” Black (Lea DeLaria). Through Ferrante’s reading of Sophia’s «re-signification of the practice of self-observation» we see how a transgender woman re-makes the history of difference feminism: through her lessons on the urethra and her role as hairdresser psychologising in front of the mirror Sophia eventually demonstrates to the women at Litchfield that there is no ‘truth’ about ‘sex’, no agreed way to embody ‘femaleness’ and ‘femininity’ (see Ferrante 2019, 123).

The second character, Big Boo, is a butch lesbian avenger who makes new worlds in the shell of the old, violent (heteronormative) ones, where masculinity is the social, cultural and – above all – political expression of maleness. From this perspective, female masculinity is not an imitation of maleness, but observable evidence that maleness is built through “masculinity” (Ferrante 2019, 96)

On the screen, Boo’s is the work of a self-conscious «eccentric subject» against both domains of heteronor-

mativity and homonormativity (ibidem, 101). With her «epistemology of the screwdriver», as Ferrante aptly calls it, she re-signifies the utensil as a sexual object by citing (and using) it out of its original context: now the screwdriver is a dildo, an object of pleasure against the rules that define what counts as a sexual(ised) organ, «thread[ing] into the realm of pure horizontality, of ongoing negotiation [... whose...] effects are multiple» (ibidem, 108). Queer(ed) sexualities and sexual practices allow personal experiences to make space for the micro-politics of freedom, shared collectively behind bars and beyond.

Experimenting with de-coloniality

In a recent book on race, nation, and gender in modern and contemporary Italy, Gaia Giuliani argues that, historically, the term «*terrone*» was ascribed to those would-be citizens seen as «ontologically and hopelessly incompatible» with the idea of a unified Nation according to dominant narratives (2019, 32). Giuliani is part of an increasing number of Italian scholars investigating the coloniality inscribed in the cultural and national history of ‘modern Italy’, the hidden stories of its racial and sexual internal outsiders.

In the *Palinsesto* (Palimpsest), Ferrante queers the vicissitudes of the first gay “*tronista*” in Maria De Filippi’s popular talk show *Uomini e Donne* (Men and Women), celebrated in the Italian popular press as the well-earned entrance of ‘queer’ subjects to the televised screen, from the standpoint of the «*mostre terrone femminile*» (2019, 43). There is a powerful detournement at play in her deployment of a derogatory term used to address Southern Italians and its subsequent re-signification as queer transfeminist method. The «*mostre terrone femminile*» is a feminist figure (following on from Puar) summoned against the order of ‘what is’, while not failing to consider the «privileges of whiteness and of citizenship» (ibidem, 47):

The making the Italian nation – as exemplified in the saying “now that Italy is made, we need to make Italians” – inaugurated new colonial campaigns within and without the Nation yet to come. The (Italian) State indeed existed with its contested borders through the end of WWII. Yet, it was up to the people

to imagine themselves as part of a nation, to identify with a spirit and a sense of community. Such spirit was written, from the very beginning, in the colonial project (ibidem, 45).

The «mostre terrone femminile» is arguably the sharpest utensil in Ferrante's toolkit, which she uses to re-energise a critique of systems of domination, obliterated to provide history books with a more appealing version of Italy's past-present-future. It conjures up an altogether different narrative of public participation in the making of the Italian nation. Through this mode of theory, Ferrante reminds us that race and the nation are always at work within non-heterosexual progressive and assimilationist projects (ibidem, 49) and, equally important, that it is necessary to contrast cultural and linguistic hierarchies by «provincialis[ing] the idea of progress within the very domain of queerness» (ibidem). Beware, Italy is under siege...

The performativity of mourning

In the chapter entitled *In drag we trust*. Legami queer e tendenze normative oltre RuPaul's Drag Race (In Drag We Trust. Queer Relations and Normative Tendencies Beyond RuPaul's Drag Race) Ferrante provides an informed reading of the «process of domestication of drag culture(s)» (2019, 109). As she cogently summarises in the last two paragraphs, «Drag Patria» and «Sexual Troopers», we have witnessed a profound change in the representation of drag cultures and the politics surrounding them, from their status as «a counterhegemonic and underground tradition» to their forceful adaptation to «contemporary pop culture» (ibidem, 146), where drag queens can be enlisted in the grammar of sexual exceptionalism. What are the costs of this shift, and how do they affect outsiders differently regarding the normative orders of gender, sexuality, and race within the context of new politics of representation, regimes of the (in)visible, and languages used to represent «otherness»?

The author juxtaposes Jennie Livingston's landmark documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) with RuPaul's reality show, reading episodes of the transgender characters' mourning alongside the texts of theorists like Butler, bell hooks, and José Esteban Muñoz. As the personal stories of Sharon Needles, Detox Incunt,

and Roxxy Andrews overlap with those told in Jean Carlomusto's 2000 documentary, *Shatzi is Dying*, the act of mourning marks the moment when subjects experience a radical opening towards vulnerability – a refusal of the injunction to stay put and a claim for care and kinship: «So long as affections are normalised and disciplined, every attempt we may make to invest attention, desire and – above all – care into those relationships in which we choose to invest is going to be a revolutionary act of rebellion» (ibidem, 137).

What Ferrante is showing is that it is only by embracing the unforeseen promises of vulnerability and putting them at the centre of new ethical encounters that new worlds can be made inside the impasse of the present (ibidem, 150).

One of the most compelling passages in Ferrante's book immerses readers in the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York, back in the early 1990s. On that day, «the radical faeries, ACT UP and other radical collectives, detached themselves from the official Pride parade and marched without permission, symbolically holding the psalm of Judy Garland, «goddess of the spirit of Stonewall»» (2019, 131). As convincingly stated by Tiziana Terranova in her Introduction to the book, Ferrante's project is self-consciously «immersed in and nourished by the undercommons of radical queer feminist thought» (2019, 12). *Pelle queer maschere straight* shows that it is possible to use theory for therapeutic ends, to clear a path towards self-care and care for others, and that this can be an activist practice, as in Ferrante's hands (see, among others, the work of bell hooks). The concluding piece, *Titoli di coda* (End Credits), loops back to the beginning of the book coming to terms with a story of family illness, documented in Marie/Max Andersen's *Relatively Fixed*. While taking care of loved ones, Anderson, like Ferrante, provides a powerful argument for representing the unrepresentable, for giving voice to the innermost desires to contribute to a different way of rebuilding relationships. This is the rationale through which Ferrante develops her counter-normative reading of the quintessential social structure – the family – from many sides, using a wide variety of texts, voices, images, bodies, and stories. Her militant project offers a valuable set of tools for

«telling the story of radical kinship [...] giving a queer slant to the critique of exclusivity and normativity in relationships and, more generally, in the critical literature about relationships» (ibidem, 154; my emphasis). The family table has seldom felt so comfortable. Grab a seat, there is still so much food for thought... (Samuele Grassi).

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