



In the Classroom, Beyond Classrooms

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We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1993

The personal is political. We open with this banner of so-called second-generation feminism not only as a tribute to a time of struggles – inside and outside academia – of which Lidia Curti was a protagonist in Naples and beyond, but also as an urgent glance at the present and the future, again “beyond,” where Lidia’s thinking was always projected. The personal, indeed, is a critical element also in the perspective of Cultural Studies, in which any possible neutrality of the critical gaze is definitively disproved (despite the imperative to “scientificity” of contemporary academia and its market). When, as Stuart Hall put it, the feminists came along and “crapped on the table” – that is, put the question of gender on the table and challenged the epistemologies that Cultural Studies had in turn disarranged – the interconnectedness of personal and political was the most obvious common thread between the different movements and (counter)fields, within and outside the academic world. Indeed, the connection between the positionality and agency of those who study cultural phenomena on one hand, and their interpretation on the other also crucially emerges in the questions of race and ethnicity; another, later moment of “crap on the table,” again in Stuart Hall’s metaphor (2006), and a gesture towards the – perhaps belated – awareness of Hall’s own position as a “Black intellectual” in Britain (Curti 2015). The history and (personal) stories, which today intersect and inform all LGBTQI+ discourse and studies, as well as the harsh debates about the right to narrate, interpret, or represent in literature or the visual arts, constitute today the core of the critical urgency to decolonize epistemologies that continues to interrogate us, and is never separable from the asymmetries of global power relations.

And again, in the critical reflection we propose on and around Lidia Curti’s intellectual work, the personal means not only one’s situatedness as scholar, but also, personal and direct engagement as teacher; it holds the act of being in the classroom – we might say face to face, or body to body, with all that this means in a post-pandemic era – as in a continuous laboratory/stage of weaving and improvisation. Here, the personal and the political could also be declined as teaching and research, or, if you will, practice and theory. Any of these terms would do, because the distinction has always been blurred, to the point that much of the critical “theory” that Lidia left us cannot be traced in publications, but rather in a thread of “oral” knowledge that blurs into readings, tests, informal accounts, and very long and sometimes heated debates.

The articles collected for this issue of *de genere* take us on a journey that starts precisely from an autobiographical and at the same time deeply theoretical reflection, through the intersections of research and teaching, to the transformations and monstrosities of the progenies of Frankenstein’s scripture-stitching, the wounds-stitching of the *mestiza* border, and finally to the speculative projection of power in Naomi Alderman’s work.

In the issue’s opening contribution, Marina Vitale takes us not only into the reconstruction of a specific time, inside the route and process of cultural (and always political) work in the 1960s–1980s, but also into the possibilities of a writing that takes

shape, precisely, within the “personal” and becomes theory. It moves, that is, in the perspective of personal positioning and in the fundamental intersection mentioned above between personal experience, and (individual and collective) subjectivity in theoretical, political and academic work. The question that becomes insistent, in Marina Vitale’s contribution and more broadly in our contemporary world, is therefore: who can speak about whom/what? What does it mean to have a voice, and in what language? Is it possible to truly decolonize the epistemologies and languages of theory and the arts? How to “do theory” by truly speaking *alongside* and not *for* the subaltern?

The subtle but potentially transformative space between personal political engagement and critical theory is also at the center of Nicoletta Vallorani’s proposition to “garden” in the sense of cultivating but evidently also composting, of rejecting the discipline and “practices of recognition” (the theater of classifications and lists) of today’s university. A reflection, in other words, on how to stay within the academy perhaps not having to give in to the now proverbial choice between being “apocalyptic or integrated”, but rather as participants in an organic, unpredictable process of harvesting (research) and exchange (teaching) with our hands in the soil and the compost always there, “doing” (Ferrante 2019). Vallorani brings to the center not only research, but in parallel also teaching, picking up the threads of the importance of the latter in Lidia Curti’s intellectual work: the theater not of disciplinary classifications (the ones imposed by the Italian Ministry of University), but of the classroom.

With Serena Guarracino’s contribution, the reflection begins to take shape inside the literary text, a monstrous form that is also genealogy. The filiation – monstrous, academic, trans-formative and revolutionary – takes us into the creature/Frankenstein, rewriting and meta-writing (which is also Mary Shelley’s monster-writing), of Alasdair Gray and Jeanette Winterson. In a tribute to Serena Guarracino’s own thread with Lidia Curti where “going backward can also mean going forward,” the article weaves the plots of the three novels into a study of textuality-monstrosity, where (again) narration and theory are not separate but rather totally integrated. The literary text continually constructs (and deconstructs), within and without itself, identities, subjectivities, voice, the monstrous as that which “shows itself,” frightens, exposes itself and us all, and the revolutionary potential of the trans*-corporeal.

A similar interweaving takes shape in Marina De Chiara’s contribution, which retraces the web that links Curti’s thought to that of Gloria Anzaldúa and especially to her seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Here, too, personal relationship (Curti is the one who originally suggested to De Chiara to work on Anzaldúa, as the author herself recounts in a footnote) and intellectual exchange, teaching and research, the personal and the political are contiguous yet continually dislocated territories, in which legacies are not origins to be archived (in the double sense of celebrating and forgetting that Jacques Derrida examines in *Archive Fever*) but continuous detonators of crises of thought that prevent key terms from becoming reiterated formulas devoid of any critical power. And in fact, De Chiara puts back into circulation the disruptive potential of intersectionality, a term now widespread in various trans-feminist movements and to which she restores the relevance of decolonial intent. Reclaiming the legacy of *mestiza* and Anzaldúa’s “mestizo feminist, anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist, but also avowedly lesbian” thought, De Chiara refuses to reduce the legacy of Anzaldúa and Curti to “sacred relics” and demonstrates its necessity for our present writing and struggle.

The last contribution of these two issues dedicated to Lidia Curti’s thought and scholarship opens to the present and future of writing and research. Andrea Raso

confronts one of the most recent texts in the landscape of women's and feminist science fiction, Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016). Here Curti's thought emerges in its profound anti-essentialism, in its refusal to consider the feminine a biological fact and not a historical and narrative positionality. Traversing a complex web of key references in difference feminism, especially Cavarero, Raso shows its ruptures by investigating how in Alderman's "ustopia" women's seizure of power leads to nothing more than a slavish reproduction of current hegemonic dynamics. By proposing an anti-essentialist and "against-the-grain" reading of the novel, the article shows the poignancy of its silences: the apparent lack of intersectional voices tells of a critical landscape in which new hegemonies have flanked secular modes of the exercise of knowledge-power. A landscape in which Lidia Curti's thought and work are still strongly needed.

Closing this issue is a "review from the future" of a lesser-known text by Curti: the monograph *Peter Brook and Shakespeare. In Search of an Avant-Garde in English Theater*, which Lidia published in 1984. Doriana Legge, a theater historian, pays tribute to the interdisciplinary nature of Curti's work, which pioneeringly, in that volume, already approached the play as an autonomous text and not as subordinate to the playscript dramaturgy – even if the latter bore the name of the most canonical author of English literature. A reversal of perspective that, while dealing exclusively with men – something that would become programmatically increasingly rare – was already able to shift the gaze to the margins of the canon, and thus create new hermeneutic perspectives. Another reminder that, even today, coming back and attending Lidia's class is, indeed, always worth it.

Works Cited

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