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The Mnemonics of Identity Crisis: Hybrid Gender and European Postmodern Memory in Literary and Audiovisual Cultures

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In the early twenty-first century, the encounter between the west and the rest entails a tension between global and local practices where collective identity and memory are facing a crisis. It is possible to discuss part of this complex picture in a textual analysis which accounts for a wide variety of factors involved in global-local identities by shifting attention from hybrid ethnicity to hybrid gender as intersecting with differences of age, citizenship, sexuality, and class within western communities. Across the boundaries of European postmodern cultures and the communication forms of literature, cinema, and the media, which are central in the early twenty-first century, a suitable selection of texts comprises the novels *Senza sangue* (*Without Blood*) (Baricco 2002) and *Corpus Delicti* (Zeh 2009), the film *Antichrist* (Von Trier 2009), and the music video for the pop-song *The Fear* (Lily Allen 2009).

As their narrative representations combine gender identity with age, citizenship, sexuality, and class, these intertextual relationships offer a wide-ranging discussion about the changes taking place in global-local identities. This issue is best explored by taking into account the fact that the violence represented across these texts is connected with cultural memory, which defines identity in opposition to otherness. The definition of identity sanctions the violent exclusion of the Other, in terms of gender, age, citizenship, sexuality, class, and related categories. In a global-local context, the

two novels, the film, and the music video converge in the exposure of identity as conformity to norms, which is then overcome with enthralling representations of hybridity, understood not in an ethnic sense but in more pervasive and intersecting socio-cultural connections across the divide between literary and audiovisual cultural artefacts.

This shift from ethnicity to gender does not result in essentialism being neglected throughout this article. However, the ethnic relationship between the west and the global rest is not considered in this discussion, which rather intends to engage with the essentialist underpinnings of gender distinctions within the west. This orientation entails a conflation of gender and other points of marginality, as this article does not intend to offer an account of single marginality. Nonetheless, this discussion of multiple marginalities is limited to the case of womanhood in the modern west, while leaving the issue of the global rest to other discussions. The particular selection of texts concerned is an experimental combination intended solely to explore this subject from a wide range of multiple marginal perspectives which converge in the exposure and overcoming of essentialist distinctions. The experimental interdisciplinary character of this discussion also implies that more attention is paid to theoretical insights from different fields than to existing criticism of the works examined.

Consensual Identities

This section presents the experimental, interdisciplinary theoretical approach of this analysis. What are hybrids? The debate is urgent in the ever more interconnected societies of the early twenty-first century:

[...] ils se comptent par milliers, par millions, et leur nombre ne cessera de croître. « Frontaliers » de naissance, ou par les hasards de leur trajectoire, ou encore par volonté délibérée, ils peuvent peser sur les événements et faire pencher la balance dans un sens ou dans l'autre. Ceux parmi eux qui pourront assumer pleinement leur diversité serviront de « relais » entre les diverses communautés, les diverses cultures, et joueront en quelque sorte le rôle de « ciment » au sein des sociétés où ils vivent. En revanche, ceux qui ne pourront pas assumer leur propre diversité se retrouveront parfois parmi les plus virulents des tueurs identitaires, s'acharnant sur ceux qui représentent cette part d'eux-mêmes qu'ils voudraient faire oublier. Une « haine de soi » dont on a vu de nombreux exemples à travers l'Histoire. (Maalouf 1998, p.46)

*(they are thousands and millions, their number will not cease to grow. 'Border-dwellers' by birth, chance, or deliberate choice, they can weigh on events and make the balance hang on one or the other side. Those amongst them who will be capable of fully taking on their otherness will soften the relationships between different communities and languages, by strengthening the connections within the societies where they live. In contrast, those who will not be capable of taking on their own otherness might end up as some of the most restless identity-thirsty murderers, hitting those who represent that part of themselves which they would like to erase from memory. A form of 'self-hatred' which has seen many an example across History.)*¹

'Border-dwellers', or hybrids, are crosses of different entities, e.g., a mule is a cross between a horse and a donkey. Yet, actually, all entities are hybrids, in so far as everything is part of many other different things: a table is part of a room, a house, and the realm of inanimate things; a rose is part of a garden, a bush, and the realm of living organisms; a human being is part of many different groups simultaneously, despite the boundaries separating these different groups. As soon as interests conflict with each other and it is

¹ Long quoted sections of translated text within this piece represent the author's own translations.

necessary to take sides, single identities distinguished from each other by essentialist boundaries are affirmed by collective and individual memory and do violence to all other features of one's distinctive individuality, as well as to the others from the opposite side of the relevant boundaries. In the early twenty-first century, global and local conflicts related to those hinted at in the passage above revolve around questions of identity. The Islamist attacks in New York and other western cities, as well as western countries' military interventions in Islamic countries, ensue from the essentialist distinction between the modern west and the rest. The awareness of hybridity, that is, of every entity's multiple memberships which often also cross the boundary between the west and the rest, is crucial in discussions on global-local hybridity. Within western communities, such social differences as gender, age, health, sexuality, and class are crossed in hybrid combinations of privilege and discrimination where identity and memory are critically and creatively constructed as exemplified by such texts as *Senza sangue*, *Corpus Delicti*, *Antichrist* and *The Fear*.

Essentialist boundaries between different forms of identity are considered with suspicion precisely due to the impossibility of single, essential or pure identities:

een proces van onttovering [...] komt tot uiting in het verander(en)de karakter van culturele gemeenschappen: deelhebben aan een bepaalde cultuur is steeds minder eenduidig geworden, omdat de culturele kern van een gemeenschap alleen maar zuiver kan blijven bij volstrekt isolement. Van een dergelijk isolement kan in de hedendaagse fase van globalisering helemaal geen sprake meer zijn, maar de onttovering is in feite al begonnen aan het begin van het moderniseringsproces: modernisering en menging van gemeenschappen zijn altijd hand in hand gegaan. (Koenis 2008, pp.272-73)

*(a process of disenchantment comes to be expressed in the changed and changing character of cultural communities: taking part in a specific culture has become ever less clear, as the cultural core of a community can remain pure only in perfect isolation. In the current phase of globalisation such an isolation is not possible any longer; in fact, disenchantment began already at the start of modernisation, which has always gone hand in hand with a blending of communities.)*²

Paradoxically, modernity contributes to the hybridisation involved in existence, as it generates increased contact between groups otherwise separated by boundaries, while also creating an essentialist separation from groups where values different from modern ones are cherished. On the one hand, global-local societies are marked by disenchantment with respect to essentialist boundaries. On the other hand, however, social distinctions always play an important part. This is represented in the four texts in discussion which share the noteworthy feature of presenting multiply disadvantaged characters, that is, not only women, but elderly, convicted, sexually depressed and lower class women.

Global-local hybridity, that is, the set of crosses between privileged and discriminated identities in the highly heterogeneous societies of the early twenty-first century, involves not only conflicts, but also possibilities:

Nella società della comunicazione generalizzata e della pluralità delle culture, l'incontro con altri mondi e forme di vita [...] significa fare esperienza della libertà come oscillazione continua tra appartenenza e spaesamento. È una libertà problematica, [...] facciamo fatica a concepire questa oscillazione come libertà: la nostalgia degli orizzonti chiusi, minacciosi e rassicuranti insieme, è sempre ancora radicata in noi, come individui e come società. (Vattimo 1989/2000, pp.19-20)

² Author's own translation.

(In mass media-based and multicultural societies, the cross between different worlds and lifestyles [...] means an experience of freedom as a ceaseless dangling (swinging, oscillation) between belonging and estrangement. It is a problematic freedom, [...] it is hard to conceive this dangling as freedom: nostalgia leads us back to enclosed, both threatening and reassuring horizons, both on the individual and the social level.)

The tension between the nostalgia for less diverse, or less complex, societies and the enjoyment of oscillation in the diversity of global-local societies is characteristic of global-local hybrids. A textual analysis of the relationships between the two novels, the film, and the music video displays the empowering role of hybridity in early twenty-first century western social groups, as represented in different art forms across literary and audiovisual cultures.

Textual analysis is a semiotic method, as it examines signs (Eco 1976, p.7), precisely not for what but for how they mean (Sturrock 1986, p.22). Language is only one of the infinite and all-pervasive systems of signs in use (Barthes 1967, p.9) and presents a level of abstraction which makes it particularly suitable in the philosophical discussion of being (Saussure 1983, p.16). Identity is socially constructed in and through narratives which articulate meaningful memory (Ricoeur 1984, p.52). Memory is a dynamic process where antecedent utterances and meanings are renegotiated (Rigney 2006). Using language, or, for that matter, any other semiotic system, involves a dialectics between the available means to create meaning (Lévi-Strauss 1974, p.29). In this respect, texts' cultural contexts play a significant role (Lotman 1990, pp.124-125) which hints at the desirability of an interdisciplinary socio-historic-philosophical approach.

In the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century, global-local hybridity involves a renegotiation of identity and memory beyond the historicist ideology of progress, with its dream

of techno-scientific control (Claeys 2005, p.273). Techno-scientific essentialism posits rationality as the absolute essence of being. Conversely, a critical ontology of hybrid history poses the force of being as relative to different perspectives, or philosophical perspectivism (Nietzsche 1887) of its phenomenological forms, which constitutes a structure of consensual meaning (Foucault 1969) in the philosophical post-structuralism of its particular intersections, or sociological intersectionality (Crenshaw 2005). In this respect, identities are reduced to essential definitions in a consensual process of negotiation; identities are *consential*, that is, both consensual and essentialist constructs. On the other hand, textual images of *dissence*, that is, dissent against the idea of essence, represent alluring scenarios of identity crisis.

As being is relative to perspective, social rituals provide a space of consent. The dimension of consensual negotiation allows different perspectives to interact in an orderly structure of conventions, which define identity and memory in terms of language, belief, class, sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, citizenship, health, and age. Each particular perspective is characterised by unique intersections of these socially constructed categories of identity and memory. Global-local identities are hybrids of social categories with the critical and creative power to be different from these very categories.

Senza sangue, *Corpus Delicti*, *Antichrist*, and *The Fear* represent narratives of women who overcome specific gender norms of conventionally defined 'worthy' and legitimate womanhood. This is possible by means of their hybrid intersections with older age, civic dissidence, sexual subversion, and mobile class. Their intertextual relations revolve around a representation of identity which transcends essentialist norms of femininity and hints at the power of

redefining one's identity in ever different crosses of behavioural patterns deriving from different categories of identity. This is discussed in the following sections with a focus on, first, the two novels and, subsequently, the two audiovisual artefacts.

Dissential Mnemonic Crisis

In the novel *Senza sangue* by the Italian writer Alessandro Baricco, the protagonist's many names and the violent loss of her family represent the transiency and the horror of being, in contrast to the stable norms through which cultural memory defines identity, in general, and femininity, in particular. The force attracting her is that of her unknown saviour, whom she meets in the transient scenery of typical non-places, namely a bar and a motel. Ontological doubt is conveyed through the tales about her supposed insanity; an existential relativity to perspective is displayed in the dialectics between her saviour's obstinate memory and her own fatalist forgetfulness and sublimation. The transience of identity is represented by what can be defined as the protagonist's polyonymy, that is, her having many different names, referring to the changes she undergoes. The suggestion is that she cannot be crystallised and fixed in one unchanging essence, as she is actually a hybrid characterised by openness to different possible forms. The other side of the coin of transiency is the horror evoked by the violent loss of her family in a vendetta action when she was a child. She learns from an early age how everything inexorably passes and returns in irredeemably different forms, following the force of transience.

Her story is actually the story of her fatalistic nostalgia (Baricco 2002, p.64) drawing her to her unknown saviour who, while involved in her family's murder, decided to let her survive. She is fatally drawn to him by the force of her own transient

existence. After many years, when they are old, the places where she meets up with him are the transient sceneries of a motel and a bar, where everyone is merely passing temporarily. Against this background of impermanence, the tales surrounding her supposed insanity and potential search for revenge are revealed as mere possibilities. Her hybrid identity, irreducible to any one essence, is evoked when she appears as a ‘vecchia donna matta [...] bambina’ (mad old woman child) (Baricco 2002, p.89), condensing her weakness in society due to her old age, female sex, dubious mental health, and refusal to move far away from her dramatic situation as a child. Actually, she makes virtue of necessity, as her story suggests. Instead of suffering social injustice as a victim, disadvantaged both as a woman and as an elder, she takes on her hybridity and deploys it to make sense of existence and to simply *be* in a meaningful way.

Her forgetfulness and his memory meet in a fatalistic revaluation of experience. In fact, while being irresistibly drawn to her past, she gives up all possible vengeful memories to fatalistically embrace her family’s murderer and her own saviour, with whom she spends a night. Conversely, he is convinced that at any moment she might kill him to quench some savage thirst for revenge, as he cannot forget the horror of his own violent vendetta, which he bitterly regrets. Only she has the relativist force to revalue that horror and find it again in him with the fatalist critical creativity represented by her foetal position. Both during the vendetta as a child and while leaning against her murderer/saviour’s shoulders as an old lady, she gets ‘rannicchiata’ (cuddled up) to ‘addormentarsi’ (fall asleep) and ‘sognare’ (dream) (Baricco 2002, p.13), as if in a ‘conchiglia tutto’ (shell-whole) (Baricco 2002, pp.15–16) characterised by simple ‘esattezza’ (exactitude) (Baricco 2002, p.19), unaware of ‘memoria

[...] giustizia [...] vendetta' (memory, justice, revenge) (Baricco 2002, pp.68–88).

Tellingly, one of the stories around her suggests that she had 'mai parlato' (never spoken) (Baricco 2002, p.71), hinting at her fatalist forgetfulness of the linguistic and cultural conventions aimed at defending oneself from impermanence as she disposes of a critically creative imagination to engage in the relativist embracement of transiency simply by sleeping and dreaming. After all, the cause of 'male' (evil) (Baricco 2002, p.82) amounts to the conflict between different stories from different perspectives, each aspiring to the crowning of the absolutist illusion of a 'mondo migliore' (better world) (Baricco 2002, p.85). The existential possibility of '*pace*' (*peace*) (Baricco 2002, p.92) is offered in that primordial position of sleeping and dreaming relativist stories, without attempting to force them over alternative stories; without blood. Her assertion of her identity in a cross of female and elderly symbolical performative acts hints at her power to overcome her socially constructed weakness as a survivor. The central metaphor of sleeping like a baby suggests the disarming force of her refusal to conform to the norms defining her identity.

The issue of identity and norms is central to the problem of state authority and citizenship. In the year 2010, which began on the disturbing note of the Detroit terrorist attack and renewed concerns about security and freedom of movement, the editorial group Random House of Munich published a handbook version of Juli Zeh's 2009 novel *Corpus Delicti. Ein Prozess*, exactly on the themes of security, state control, and civil rights. In yet one more variant on Germany's reworking of its not too distant dictatorial past, the novel explores the social and political construction of the body and health in grotesquely authoritarian forms of discipline. As the legal Latin

title *corpus delicti* suggests, delinquency is in the (unhealthy) body. The protagonist, Mia Holl, incarnates Antigone's tragic dilemma of the tension between critique and abidance to law, as she rebels against the dictatorial system and is trialled as a terrorist.

Mia's dilemma arises when her brother commits suicide while in prison due to an error in a DNA test related to a rape and murder of which he is unjustly accused. As this event leads her to radically question the alleged infallibility of the science-based political system and the all-pervasive technological equipment, she publicly refuses to keep on doing the physical exercise demanded of all citizens for the optimal performance of their bodies. Ironically, her judges eventually decide to make a concession and not send her into exile by clinically freezing her body which would have been her only possible escape from her nightmarish community. The protagonist is eloquently portrayed as a postmodern witch, an outcast of society. The novel *Corpus Delicti* provides a highly creative relativist narration which criticises the absolute values of security, justice, order, health, and male-centred rationality, through an imaginative depiction of revolt.

The German text represents a dystopian state based on a disturbing form of health terrorism, as evident from the extensive explanation provided by the ideologist Kramer:

Im Gegensatz zu allen Systemen der Vergangenheit gehorchen wir weder dem Markt noch einer Religion. Wir brauchen keine verstiegenen Ideologien. Wir brauchen nicht einmal den bigotten Glauben an einer Volksherrschaft, um unser System zu legitimieren. Wir gehorchen allein der Vernunft, indem wir uns auf eine Tatsache berufen, die sich unmittelbar aus der Existenz von biologischem Leben ergibt. Denn *ein* Merkmal ist jedem lebenden Wesen zu eigen. Es zeichnet jedes Tier und jede Pflanze und erst recht den Menschen aus: Der unbedingte,

individuelle und kollektive Überlebenswille. Ihn erheben wir als Grundlage der großen Übereinkunft, auf die sich unsere Gesellschaft stützt. Wir haben eine METHODE entwickelt, die darauf abzielt, jedem Einzelnen ein möglichst langes, störungsfreies, das heißt, gesundes und glückliches Leben zu garantieren. Frei von Schmerz und Leid. Zu diesem Zweck haben wir unseren Staat hochkomplex organisiert, komplexer als jeden anderen vor ihm. Unsere Gesetze funktionieren in filigraner Feinabstimmung, vergleichbar dem Nervensystems eines Organismus. Unser System ist perfekt, auf wundersame Weise lebensfähig und stark wie ein Körper – allerdings ebenso anfällig. Ein simpler Verstoß gegen eine der Grundregeln kann diesen Organismus schwer verletzen und sogar töten. (Zeh 2009/2010, pp.36-37)

(In contrast to all past systems, we obey neither the market, nor any religion. We do not need any belief in national supremacy as a legitimation of our system. We obey only reason, in that we invoke an objective fact that is essential to the existence of biological life. For one feature inheres in each living creature. It marks every animal and every plant and humanity itself: the unconditional, individual and collective will to survive. We elevate this principle as the foundation of the great agreement on which our society rests. We have developed a METHOD aimed to guarantee a possibly long, undisturbed, that is, healthy and happy life for each individual. Devoid of pain and suffering. To this end we have organized an overcomplex state, more complex than ever before. Our laws function in filigree harmony, as can be compared to the nervous system of an organism. Our system is perfect, wonderfully alive and strong as a body – nonetheless, equally vulnerable. One simple attack against any of its basic rules can cost this organism severe wounds and even death.)

The state of the *METHOD* claims to pursue the objective good of the collective, associated with health. Metaphorically, this totalitarian state poses itself as a healthy body, a perfect organism whose harmony is in constant jeopardy of disruption. The system's

vulnerability is the justification for the persecution of any critics, such as Mia.

Although health looks like an ideal that transcends the logic of the market and nationalist rage, the METHOD is in fact the culmination of the health models advertised for commercial purposes in liberal societies, in conjunction with a kind of state terrorism reminiscent of nationalist policies. Health purity is posited as the essence, whereas Mia is a hybrid citizen, associated with a witch. The etymology of the German word for witch is traced back to the original meaning of *hedge-rider* in the novel, underscoring Mia's border-identity:

Die Zaunreiterin befindet sich auf der Grenze zwischen Zivilisation und Wildnis. Zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits, Leben und Tod, Körper und Geist. Zwischen Ja und Nein, Glaube und Atheismus. Sie weiß nicht zu welcher Seite sie gehört. Ihr Reich ist das *Dazwischen*. (Zeh 2009/2010, p.144)

(The hedge-rider finds herself at the border between civilisation and the wild. Between this and that side, life and death, body and mind. Between yes and no, belief and atheism. She does not know where she belongs. Her realm is the in-between.)

In stark contrast to the state's essentialism of health purity, Mia is a relativist hybrid who finds value beyond the conventional dichotomy of survival and death. Her liminal and cyclical oscillation between extremes provides a lucid reflection on identity and otherness in a post-liberal society dominated by an essentialist discourse reminiscent of nationalist ideologies and propaganda.

Against a minutely detailed background of state authority, the narrative of Mia complements that of the old woman in the Italian novel. Both characters rebel against the social pressure to crystallise one's identity in an essentialist form and rather choose to embrace

their identity crisis in a hybrid condition. The hybrid intersections of femininity with old age and civic dissidence display the power of a form of memory that embraces identity crisis.

Dissentially Devilish Pleasures and Angelic Fear

The film *Antichrist* by the Danish film director Lars von Trier represents the overcoming of the identity and pleasure of the subject as functional to the reproductive regime of Christianity and modernity. As suggested by the title, it is fitting to relate the scenes of extreme sexual pleasure in the first half of the film to a Nietzschean revaluation of values beyond good and evil. The film as a whole is a claustrophobic close up on the satanic secrets of an angelic couple who correspond to the heteronormative standards of traditional morality. The narrative of a man and a woman having sex with an apparent willingness to procreate, as sanctioned in the divine order, is turned upside down in what is presented as the woman's fragile mental health.

She is haunted by dark dreams where she walks amidst a hostile vegetation at night, which is conveyed through surreal nocturnal landscapes in the film. Her visions make her nights unbearable and her days exhausting, as her restless state starts to interfere with her relationship with her husband. The pensive moods in which she feels as if imprisoned create an ambiance of gloom and coldness, in striking contrast to the passionate and explicit sexual scenes. She deviates from the order of conventional pleasure and identity inherent in heteronormative reproductive sexuality.

Her self-remedy is shocking from the perspectives of both traditional morality and modern rationality. She engages in ever more violent sex with her husband, where she finally makes recourse to what is visualised as a ritual castration. In the middle of an

obsessively monotonous narrative following a slow routine of passionate sex and depressive poses, she cuts her man's penis while in erection, which is all shown in the film without hiding a detail. Her fury makes her hit him hard and obstinately so as to dominate him completely.

Such a hyperbolic course of action is blatantly opposed to her husband's advice to master her dreams, by imagining reaching a luminous lawn and melting in the green. The dichotomy between this symbolic narrative pattern of male rationality and her female fury provides a vivid picture of the conventional separation between God's goodness and Satan's evil. What is echoed in her revolt is Lucifer's rebellion against the divine order. In conversation with her husband before her extreme act, she explains that her anxiety is mysteriously connected with her university readings about patriarchy and women's emancipation. In fact, her revolt goes beyond the distinction between man and woman, as she does not limit herself to castrating her husband but also engages in an equally explicitly shown self-clitoridectomy. These images of seeming madness symbolise a revolt against all that which has a tendency to erection, that is, to a hierarchical, vertical phallic order, as symbolised by the penis or clitoris. Along with the absolute hierarchy of values, she gives a decisive cut to all possibilities of conventional pleasure and linearly defined identity, as the physical parts of normalised sex are literally removed.

The film ends in an orgy of violence where the castrated man yields to the temptation of an irrational fight in an ecstasy of mutually inflicted pain. The surreal landscapes representing the darker side of normalcy reappear, this time crowded with naked bodies intersecting with each other in an endless orgy, which serves as an irresistibly grotesque background to the fight of what finally

looks like two bleeding demons. The text represents, through these signs thus arranged, the overcoming of conventional pleasure which pervades the beginning in the ultimate dimension of satanic, that is, critical ecstasy.

This excessive rebellion to normative identity is echoed in popular culture. In the music video of the pop-song *The Fear*, the British performer Lily Allen plays the role of a low-class teenage girl who escapes her socially determined duty as a poor raiser of children by engaging in a hilarious ascent to fame, for which she uses her gendered body as a tool for success. Her body is seemingly defenceless both as a woman and as a poor citizen with a low or no income, whereas she actually makes the best of this apparently disadvantageous hybrid identity. The song and the video offer a playful caricature of consumerist societies, where disenchantment with traditional values is ironically camouflaged as innocent fear, associated with uncertainty. Fame is subtly connected to prostitution, as the lyrics stress the girl's willingness to show her nudity in order to become a celebrity. Ultimately, the visual, musical, and linguistic text lends itself to an interpretation of the climate of fear and uncertainty pervading heterogeneous societies as the existential chance to succeed while pretending to be subservient to the sexist system.

The initial situation is visualised in the images of the girl living in miserable conditions in a caravan. Her dreams of economic success exclude the traditional values attached to qualities and emotions ('I want to be rich and I want to be famous / I don't care about clever, I don't care about funny'; Lily Allen 2009). The simplicity of scenery and lyrics corresponds to very simple melodies and arrangements. The singer manages to mimic with her voice a low and intimate tone, which suggests complicity and enhances the comic effect of the whole text. Lily is in colourful attire and looks

seriously into the camera, sometimes smiling maliciously as in a parody of the stereotypes surrounding adolescents in consumerist contexts.

The refrain exposes the central feeling of fear which involves uncertainty as to what to do and what to believe in. The second sentence stresses the inability to feel genuine emotions: 'I don't know how I'm meant to feel anymore' (Lily Allen 2009). The iteration of the adverb *anymore* conveys the idea of irrevocable change in a definitive shift away from a stable past. These rhetorical choices are related to concerns about the deleterious impact of consumerism and modernity upon teenagers, in particular. The clarity of vision characterising the teenager's words and acts which constitute the context of the refrain reveals that her fear is only ironically dissimulated, while she knows very well what to do in the sexist system where she looks like an innocent victim.

The underlying irony is evident from the contrast between her supposed fear and the confidence with which she receives the attention and services of her male servants who dance around her in the fabulous manor house where she ends up thanks to her willingness to sell her body to the media. Exactly after singing the refrain for the first time, she asserts that 'life's all about film stars and less about mothers', and that she herself is 'a weapon of massive consumption' (Lily Allen 2009). The second time she sings the refrain, her servants are masked as boxes with ribbons on a chessboard and she is the indisputable queen of the game, as the chessboard and the men dressed as birthday presents suggest that in consumerism everything is play.

Even terrorism and war are games, as Lily proclaims: 'Forget about guns and forget ammunitions / 'coz I'm killing them all on my own little mission [...] and everything's cool as long as I'm getting

thinner' (Lily Allen 2009). In delirious metaphors, teenage anorexia is associated with weapons of war, and the overall sense of fiction and illusion triumphs in the profusion of coloured balloons when she sings the refrain for the last time. The hyperbolic extravaganza of *The Fear* hinges on the power of embracing the crisis of the norms regulating one's socially constructed identity in order to subvert it from a critical and creative position where a sexualised low-class woman becomes the master of the consumerist game. The cross of fake fear and unrestrained confidence is an irresistible hybrid which constitutes an ironic critique to the norms of identity facing a crisis in the early twenty-first century. This playful imagery complements the gothic one espoused in Von Trier's film. Whether in hybrid intersections with subversive sexuality or mobile class, both narratives engage in an embrace of the crisis of feminine identity.

Hybrid Dissence

In the novels *Senza sangue* and *Corpus Delicti*, the film *Antichrist*, and the music video *The Fear*, the narratives of the elderly, the terrorist, the castrator and the class climber overcome essentialist norms of female identity in a hybrid blending with older age, dissident citizenship, subversive sexuality, and mobile class, respectively. The elderly woman refuses to define her identity in essentialist terms, as her existential choice is to fatalistically embrace events without trying to force them, but rather by making sense of them, loving a man whom she had reason to hate. The trialled terrorist overcomes the normative boundary between citizenship and dissidence. The castrating wife engages in a hyperbolic redefinition of her sexual self where the gender binary is transcended. The rising teenager pretends to become a slave to consumerism, only to finally be served by it. The four texts overcome the fear of instability inherent in essentially

defined identity through representations of hybrids who love the precariousness of their own condition, without conforming to stable conventions. Their hybrid mnemonics embrace creatively the postmodern identity crisis.

Across the boundaries which separate literature from cinema and the media, these four works present interesting points in common which bear witness to the possibilities available in early twenty-first century global-local contexts. Their common concern with multiply disadvantaged women leads to parallel reflections on the power of a critical and creative embrace of one's hybridity beyond the ideal of a stable identity. The very different styles of literary minimalism, cinematic theatricality, and ironic pop extravaganza converge in a form of hybrid dissent against the essentialism of normative identity and memory.

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