

Black Gaia: On plastic palms and crocodile leather boots.

Jordi Vivaldi, December 2020

What an ugly long neck he has. 7 notifications. Mute chat.

It finally arrives. I push, I get on, I push, I sit down, they push me, it's the stupid man with the long neck.

He looks at me, I look at him. Long curly hair, brown eyes. Thick lips. His face is angular, elongated. He smiles at me. He carries two big blue bags full of shoes, together with a mirror and a small palm. Creepiness. Headache. I look outside. Woolly fog. Darkness. It rains. His face pokes out on the reflection of the window. He is still smiling. When he smiles, his eyes smile too.

The bus departs. The next curfew will be soon, and, still, the road is full of traffic. Dust. Hot wind. Pollution. Rain. The man of the long neck opens one of these blue bags. Such a horrendous blue. He takes out a wet book. His hands are sweating. It is hot. He opens the book. He closes the book. He looks at me, I look at him. He murmurs something and opens the book again. He turns some pages, from left to right, from right to left; goes backwards, finds its place, gets lost. He insists; he starts at any point, recedes, swipes a fold of pages, doubts, goes backwards, turns, swipes again, slides. He stops.

- "Earthing with organic and inorganic beings that are no longer subordinated to the human, but attuned to a vast litany of species; - quick sigh - this is the purpose of Black Gaia. Despite its wide speculative vocation, Black Gaia is rooted in the immediacy of our here and now: the hole in the ozone layer, frozen seed banks, global pandemics, xenobots, ocean garbage patches or transgenic animals constitute some of those strange objects invading our planet while circumventing the epistemic categories characteristic of Modernity. -The doors open. People getting off. He stretches his long neck, caresses his wet curls, softens his voice. I cannot stand his accent. - Bastard creatures comprising a vast litany of multispecie entanglements, eclectic composites and hybrid processes resulting from intimate relations between strangers, between "others", between xenos."

Black Gaia is a narrative mode of "earthing with others". - The seat in front of me gets vacant; he throws himself onto it. Houndstooth wrinkles. Tobacco smell. The mirror slides between the seat and the armchair; it reflects a pair of crocodile leather boots.- It is a terrestrial sensibility and a logic of otherness; it flattens ontological hierarchies by assuming the emancipation of the biological, ecological, algorithmic and geological other: Carnal robots, planetary viruses, digital bots, human-made earthquakes or transgenic plants; mestizo recombinations whose otherness

is no longer that of a “Galilean object” and its perpetual human subjugation, but that of an emancipated active being, a “Lovelockian agent” that mutates in community with different forms of life rooted in Earth: human and nonhuman, organic and machinic, cultural and natural. -| keep thinking about the neighbour. He still hasn’t got it. I hate him. This morning again. If it would be a bit later it would be faster. But at the rush hour between the sun and the curfew the city is a mess. Those crocodile leather boots... they ought to have another button on the instep. - Thus, far from the invariably vampirised mark of alterity of classical philosophy or the fetishized and necessarily othered other of deconstruction, the terrestrial other is understood here as “a moving horizon of exchanges and becoming, towards which the non-unitary subjects of postmodernity move, and by which they are moved in return” .

Black Gaia ignores nature. Or better, it renders it obsolete: nature is no longer an exterior entity, a transcendent and infinite source of vitality. -The bus stops, the palm falls down. It is a plastic palm. The man with the long neck sets it between his legs and slides some leaves around his shoulders. He looks rather ridiculous. The bus departs again, few leaves move on his chest, others lie on the floor. I turn right. The bus is almost empty. - There is no “Great Outside”: once Modernity’s classifications have been blurred, nature becomes everything, that is, nothing: an empty term, a placeholder. Black Gaia focuses instead on the Earth; Gea, Terra, Tellus. The Earth as a compost, as a conglomerate participated by humans. Participating: partaking, forming part; rather than inhabiting the Earth, humans are Earth, or better, humans Earth (verb). Humans are no longer driving Buckminster Fuller’s Spaceship Earth as adventurous pilots scrutinizing Universe’s corners with an orbiting rocket. -A motorbike sounds the horn. One time. Two times. Three times. Four times. I hate motorbikes. I hate this city. My phone rings. Mute calls.- Humans are not the pilots of a spaceship. Humans are the spaceship.

Black Gaia is a demothering force. Ah, physis and maternity! An intimate and ancient union, a marriage sanctified by one of those totemic figures that underpins the western culture: Gea, Ge, also known with the terms Gaya or Gaia. As an invisible force or as an animate being, Gaia is the ancient mother, the roman Tellus Mater and the miscenic Ma-ka, the greek mythological and “universal mother who nourishes everything there is both on this holy land and in the sea and all that flies”. As naturata naturata or as natura naturans, Gaia, the ⁴ “wide-bosomed” Gaia, brings all to fruition; Gaia spreads vitality, Gaia favours abundance. Gaia is maternal protection. - The owner of the crocodile leather boots stands up. Short red braids, lunar face. Small eyes. She is a corpulent woman. Middle aged, big hands. I love those boots. Monumental. Colorful. Sauvage. They miss one button on the instep. While walking through the corridor, she steps on one branch of the plastic palm. She stops. The man with the long neck ceases whispering and inclines his head. Irritation. Disdain. He looks at the crocodile leather boots. She looks at the green plastic palm. - Pardon madam -.- But, how to explain Dolly ‘s cloning under Gaia’s immaculate mantle? How Gaia’s pristine warmth could embrace something as dark and corrupt as a Xenobot? Transgenic plants, living machines, ocean garbage patches: dark bastardizations and perverse recombinations conjuring up multispecie compounds that oppose the pure and maternal spirit of Gaia. - He checks the time on the phone; nine forty-six. Pause. Silence. There is soil in the flowerpot. Idiot. - Mestizo and

clandestine, Black Gaia negates Gaia. It brandishes an anti-maternal and anti-natural narrative; it presents a chaotic, immanent and finite Earth earthing, a myriad of organic and inorganic beings navigating across the universe under the sole light of their own free associations.

Black Gaia provides darkness. Darkness; the field of the unknown and the kingdom of the possible. Darkness; question and mystery, fear and fascination. Darkness; astonishment, surprise, tension. Vertigo. Gaia's ideological basis is subverted; Black Gaia perturbs Gaia's white, eurocentric, heterosexual and patriarchal modulation by opposing latter's reactionary Christian appropriation. Associated with a virginal and secularized Eden Garden, Gaia embodies the harmonic, cyclical and tender Mother Nature. - The doors open, the owner of the crocodile leather boots gets off. It is already dark. Traffic, heat, rain. Congestion. She stares at us through the glass. "G is calling you". Refuse call. Under the neoliberal notion of Green Ecology, Gaia is revealed as a new opium for the masses: a reactionary force that imposes an unquestionable authority, obstructs alternatives, identifies sins, applies punishments and, above all, defines moral values. In return, it offers a "promised land": the return to an immaculate nature, purified through the domestication of a modern man whose excessive artificiality has transformed the planet into a denatured place. The logic orchestrated by Black Gaia is exactly the opposite. Faced with a hyper-technified world, it offers more technology. Faced with an inhuman world, it offers more otherness. Faced with an alienated world, it offers more alienation. And, above all, faced with an adulterated world, it offers more artifice. - This bus is so fucking slow. It brakes, it moves, it slows down. It stops. Kurfürstendamm. Still two more. I am so late. Sigh. Tedium. I look at myself in the window. Sweaty forehead, pale cheeks. No make up. I want those crocodile leather boots; nature, savagery. Manaus: jungle, cascades, palms. Wildness. The man of the long neck caresses the plastic leaves lying on his shoulders, and, with his fingers, grabs one big branch. It is green. Green-yellow, almost lime. He folds it. He turns the page. - Biological agents, ecological agents, technological agents and cultural agents cooperate in a reality that is no longer constructed based on Promethean epics, relativist ironies or primitivist nostalgia, but accelerated hybrids: poly-plural constructs blurring the borders between modern epistemic taxonomies.

Black Gaia does not redeem the excesses of the modern human. In opposition to the Promethean pretensions of Gaia's green ecology, Black Gaia does not respond to a natural crisis. It is not meant to offer salvation from an apocalyptic dystopia, nor does it offer the nostalgic protection of a virgin nature: it does not yearn for a green planet; it does not exalt sustainability as a technocratic elixir. -Next stop. Soon. I stand up. He stops me. -"The umbrella. Don't forget the umbrella"- . Christ, he looks so absurd. Wet curls, plastic greenery, black soil. Such a long neck. I take the umbrella. It is soggy. The bus turns left. Stop. Traffic light. Crowd, heat, rain, waiting.- Black Gaia represents the accelerated reaction to an ontological crisis: that of naturalism, of positivism, of relativism. -short sight, agitation- It stages resistance to a hierarchical understanding of the world, a world that still operates based on a 1000-year-old dichotomy: the confrontation between nature and artifice as irreconcilable opposites rather than as promiscuous reverberations. Promiscuus; the favouring (pro) of mixtures (miscere); the

promotion of mutual exchange, the end of maternal protection, the replacement of domination by deviation, the desire for inclination, the viscous and permeable presence of an Earth no longer objectualized in front of us but enmeshed and intertwined; an Earth earthed by us and earthing through us.

Black Gaia is tactile. Where distance was what once broadened the mythical reach of Gaia's sacred nature, Black Gaia exalts intense contiguity. It embraces carnal technologies based on a new mythology of digital artifacts favouring a relation with an algorithmical, biological or ecological other that is no longer rooted in the insurmountable physical separation of Modernity, but rather in a carnal familiarity whose experience is not just sensory but sensual. - The bus turns left, the palm falls down. Second time. The floor is full of soil. How stupid. I hate him. This bus is a jungle. A plastic jungle. Leaves, branches. Soil everywhere. He stares at me: "we miss the crocodile leather boots now, madam". Fuck. I hate this city. The doors open. I get down. Green Door Bar, straight ahead.- Radically pagan, Black Gaia is decipherable and manipulable; the propagation of artificial intelligence and the multi-scalar robotization of the organic establishes, in addition to a change of medium, a change of condition: its algorithmic power does not merely offer itself as an automatic pilot for daily life, but it also triggers a radical manipulation of Gaia's Adamian corporality: it sets up a perennial and universal intertwining between bodies and information that opposes Gaia's unpenetrable nature. The multidisciplinary generalization of machine learning, the progress in genetic engineering or the robotization of the mundane no longer refer to a humanity that is merely extended, but to a humanity that is expanded, that is, inclined, or better, deviated: it is woven by algorithmic, biologic, and ecologic agents whose symbiosis is not only metaphorical or figurative, but performative.

Accelerated and accelerative hybrids; multispecie composites distanced in equal measure from the blind gears of Modernity and the lived flesh of Phenomenology. Symbiotic aggregates and narratives of bastardization; strange creatures deviating any pristine and ideal origine, impure and irregular bodies, algorithmic folds, bionic composites, saturated nestings, ecological miscegenations. Cartographical rather than classificatory, and, above all, anti-maternal, anti-natural and anti-humanist, Black Gaia is nothing but the radical earthing of our planet under the premise that the future is a better companion for the present than the past.