

Gadda's *Pasticciaccio* and the Knotted Posthuman Household

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The celebrated final scenes of Carlo Emilio Gadda's novel, "Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana", find detective Ingravallo pursuing a clue as he investigates the brutal murder of Liliana Balducci, an upper-middle-class inhabitant of an apartment on the street of the novel's title. The location for the book's concluding showdown is a dilapidated house, or an "oikos", to borrow from the Greek, into which the Investigator, an outsider, is introduced. "Oikos", which became the prefix "eco" in both "economics" (literally, law of the house) and "ecology" (or, study of the house) here provides a dynamic lens for the final scenes of the Pasticciaccio, and for viewing its unremitting tension between singularity and generality, interiority and exteriority, anthropic and geological time, human and posthuman. Our article proposes the space of the impoverished Roman household as a key to entering the Gaddian narrative architecture, a space that resonates with what Jeffery Jerome Cohen describes as "the tangled, fecund, and irregular pluriverse humans inhabit along with lively and agency-filled objects, materials, and forces" (Prismatic Ecology, xxiii). The dwelling on Via Merulana, and even more distinctly the house (or hovel) in which the novel ends, challenge our notions of domestic spaces, their porosity, and their proper inhabitants. In fact, in the narrative's exploration of these two houses and their occupants, we find intriguing portraits of the tensions that trouble the supposed borders of the human and the posthuman. The "Pasticciaccio", as we argue, closes (or opens) the door on a narrative architecture of polarity, where material and ontological tensions lead to both human and posthuman conclusions.

Keywords: Carlo Emilio Gadda, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, dirt theory, Via Merulana, Leibniz, monads, finitude, nomadic thought, stone.

Where does the posthuman dwell? At what address? And in what type of house? Architectural and logistical questions must be formulated as we contemplate notions of environments and ecologies, in particular given that the prefix *eco* comes (as many have noted) from the Greek *oikos* for

“household” (Buell 2005, 13). As the terrain in fields including posthumanism, ecocriticism, and the environmental humanities shifts, taking on materialities and ontologies to admit the agency of things animal, vegetable, and mineral, the architecture of our shared domicile also transforms. Ecology, of course, understands that the entire earth is our household. Yet as two creatures who spend many hours at our desks in Florida and Michigan, sheltered from sun and snow by walls and roofs, we propose that examining the shape of micro-households (our single-family dwellings, our apartments and condos and hotel rooms and offices) has important implications in a posthuman world, and that posthumanism in turn can transform our sense of the built environment. Is a house a container for anthropic action, or is it coextensive with its human and nonhuman inhabitants, and an agent in its own right? As Ariane Lourie Harrison insists when mapping posthuman territory in the context of architecture, “the posthuman challenges the long-standing conception of the building as an object autonomous from its environment and governed by disciplinary interiority” (2013, 3). In understanding human embeddedness in the nonhuman world, we come to understand that “nature”, as Harrison points out, is not “other” to architecture. In a range of lively examples, from French-Hungarian sculptor Nicolas Schöffer’s Spatiodynamic Tower (1954) to American architectural team Diller + Scofidio’s vapor-cloud Blur building (2002), Harrison shows how our contemporary imagination can begin to envision a “networked, responsive – or even posthuman – architecture” (2013, 11) that destabilizes thresholds and invites in the world and its nomadic plurality of species, climates, and technologies¹.

1. GADDIAN POLARITIES OF STONE AND DEATH

The Roman apartment building at 219 Via Merulana and at the heart of Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (*That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*) is a far cry in architectural terms from the vibrating, transparent, perforated constructions that Harrison describes. “Worm-eaten and gray”, it is “one of those big buildings constructed at the beginning of the century which fill you at first sight with a sense of

¹ See Harrison 2013, 11-23, for further descriptions of these spaces, as well as Harrison’s case studies interspersed throughout the collection. See also <http://www.dsrny.com/projects/blur-building> (accessed August 19, 2015) for a video of the Blur building.

boredom and canarified contrition" (Gadda 2007, 22)². And yet the dwelling on Via Merulana, and even more distinctly the house (or hovel) in which the novel ends, challenge our notions of domestic spaces, their porosity, and their proper inhabitants. In fact, in the descriptions of these two houses and their occupants, we find intriguing portraits of the tensions that trouble the supposed borders of the human and the posthuman.

Such tensions in fact define the Milanese-born writer Gadda (1893-1973). Albert Sbragia diagnoses a "poetics of polarity" in Gadda's writing, foregrounding a contrast between "lyricism and satire, subjectivity and mimesis, historical awareness and reactionary blindness" (1996, 28). Comparable polarities mark Gadda's temperament, which Italo Calvino describes as oscillating between rage and civility, reason and angst:

An electrical engineer, he tried to master his hypersensitive, anxious temperament with a rational, scientific mentality, but he simply exacerbated it instead; and in his writing he gave vent to his irascibility, his phobias, his fits of misanthropy, which in his everyday life he repressed behind the mask of ceremonious politeness belonging to a gentleman of another age. (Calvino 2007, VII-VIII)

Given these manifold polarities, it comes as no surprise that Gadda's work is also marked by a fluctuation between an apparently posthuman sensibility, attuned to a dynamic material world in which the human is firmly enmeshed, and an anguished awareness of the tragic finitude of the individual organic entity, mortally vulnerable to violence and ultimately doomed to disappear. Gadda's *Pasticciaccio* follows, though rarely in a linear fashion, two narrative threads or, as befits this detective novel, two crimes committed in the building on Merulana Street and assigned to police investigator Francesco Ingravallo. The first crime involves a theft of jewels from the apartment of Signora Menegazzi, while the second is the murder of Detective Ingravallo's friend Liliana Balducci. These crimes point us to those two Gaddian poles most relevant to what we might term his anguished posthumanism. While the jewels belong quite literally to the temporal and spatial limitlessness of geological time, the murdered Liliana leads us into the tragically fleeting realm of anthropic temporality.

The first Gaddian pole anticipates the concerns of fields including post-humanism, the new materialisms, and material ecocriticism, in that it seems to conceive, as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann propose material ecocriticism does, the "engagement with matter as a condition to retrace

² All citations from the *Pasticciaccio* come from this edition. The *Pasticciaccio* first appeared in 1946 in five installments in *Letteratura*. In 1957 a revised version was published in novel form by Garzanti.

and recognize agential emergences as they coalesce in social, scientific, and cognitive practices” (2012, 451)³. In the critically well-trodden passage where the stolen jewels are located by Corporal Pestalozzi in a grubby bedpan, for example, a single object reflects and refracts the passage of time: “[...] a little cross of some semiprecious dark-green stone, which the fingertips of the future sergeant could not stop savoring [...]: a handsome, shining little green-black cylinder, for interpreting horoscopes by the shitty priests for Egypt [...]: mysteriosophic candy, concealed in the ancient womb of the earth, seized from the earth’s womb, one day geometrized to magic” (2007, 320). The vast temporality of the gems is noteworthy – from Pestalozzi’s future promotion from corporal to sergeant, they hurtle backwards to ancient Egypt and, even further, to the time when they were extracted from their incubation in a telluric uterus. The text grasps the jewels’ dynamic materiality; they are not stable objects fixed in time, but are instead defined by their incessant and infinite becoming, branching outwards and connecting with other entities across eons⁴. Gadda clarifies this representational position when he explains that: “[...] things, objects, events have no value to me in and of themselves, closed within the wrapping of their individual skin, [...]; they have value to me in an expectation, in a waiting for what will follow, or in an appeal to what preceded and determined them” (2001, 211). After all, he explains, the fact or the object in and of itself is little more than the “dead body of reality, the fecal residue of history” (2007, 212).

In the philosophical treatise *Meditazione milanese (Milanese Meditation)*, written in the late 1920s and published posthumously in 1974, Gadda contests the very notion of stable matter or substance. Referencing Heraclitus, the philosopher commonly, though perhaps erroneously, associated with the phrase *πάντα ῥεῖ* (*panta rhei* or “everything flows”), Gadda claims that the persistence of apparently unchanged elements within a system creates what is an illusion of continuity, unity, or stable being (2002, 17). Here, and in multiple other texts, Gadda’s work offers a vision of a dynamic materiality where beings and objects are defined (and redefined) by their relation

³ Iovino and Oppermann propose that approaching “matter as a text, [...] broadens the range of narrative agencies, making it a ‘posthuman performativity’”, in order to ask the following questions: “[...] who is the storyteller of these stories narrated through and across bodies by manifold material-discursive agents, such as toxic waste, sick cells, individual organisms, and social forces? Who is really the ‘narrating subject’, if things – collectives, assemblages, actants – are narrative agencies?” (2012, 459).

⁴ Gian Carlo Roscioni writes that, rather than “naming objects”, Gadda “surprises them in their becoming” (1969, 3). Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Italian are ours.

to a multifaceted reality. Matter acquires that same animation that Jane Bennett identifies in her account of a "vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans" (2010, viii)⁵. Equally important is the fact that agency is not the exclusive domain of a human subjectivity endowed with intentionality⁶. Rather, in Gadda's literary universe, all material entities, organic and inorganic, exert agentic force, another factor that opens the way for comparison with new materialisms such as, for example, Timothy Morton's consideration of object-oriented ontology (2013) or Karen Barad's reflections on "intra-action" where agency becomes an "enactment", rather than "something that someone or something has" (2007, 214).

If the jewels are dazzling examples of this Gaddian dynamism, radiating outwards in all temporal directions to forge relations with future sergeants and long deceased Egyptians, where does the murdered Liliana and her human finitude fit in? Actually, the dynamic materiality of relation also underpins Gadda's understanding of human subjectivity. He contests in no uncertain terms the concept of an entity separated from the totality of beings, claiming, in a 1953 essay titled *L'egoista* (*The Egoist*), that all our lives are "symbiosis with the universe" and our individuality is the "meeting point" or the "knot or tangle of countless relations with countless situations (facts or beings) that are apparently external to us" (2001, 234). In a formulation that resonates with chaos theory's butterfly effect, he argues for the interdependence of all things: "If a dragonfly flies in Tokyo, it triggers a chain reaction that reaches me" (2001, 234)⁷. However, despite this resounding rejection of a self-contained subjectivity which he derides as that of a "postal parcel" (2002, 36), Gadda seems highly sensitive to the destiny of this individuated subject. And while his considerations of interconnectedness frequently embrace a chaotic and even joyously mischievous tone, his portraits of the demarcated subject introduce a wrathful tone of tragic anguish.

⁵ Gadda's baroque style also partakes of this dynamism. He acknowledges that any word employed has long lost its virginity and, over the course of its history, has acquired multiple meanings and nuances which can be further deformed by a "spastic" use (2001, 18). For an excellent study of Gadda's vital materialism in the context of *La cognizione del dolore* (*Acquainted with Grief*), see Falkoff 2014.

⁶ A spectacular example of this is the destruction generated by the lightning strike in *Acquainted with Grief*.

⁷ This formulation seems indebted to the thought of Leibniz, a philosopher dear to Gadda. Specifically, the question of interconnectedness suggests paragraph 61 of the *Monadology*: "[...] each body is affected, not only by those in contact with it [...] but also, through them, it feels the effects of those in contact with the bodies with which it is itself immediately in contact. From this it follows that this communication extends to any distance whatsoever" (1989, 221).

What appears to underpin this tragic tone is the vulnerability and finitude of the subject. Indeed, while the first pole of the *Pasticciaccio*, the jewels, offers a vast configuration of spatial and temporal relation, the second, the murder, suggests a violent amputation of these same relations. Reduced to a corpse, Liliana is “cruelly separated from all things, from the lights and phenomena of the world” (2007, 380) and her death constitutes an “extreme decomposing of possibles, an unfocusing of interdependent ideas, formerly harmonized in one person” (2007, 84). While these citations still suggest a subject defined by relation, Liliana also points us to an alternative configuration of subjectivity not uncommon in Gadda’s pages. In opposition to the subject of relation, he indicates a fruitless human tendency to shore up the borders of the self in an attempt to sever human subjectivity from its material enmeshment. In the case of Liliana these efforts revolve around her bourgeois status and her unfulfilled longing for the legacy of a child⁸. Whether this vain tendency towards self-preservation stems from terror before death’s annihilation or constitutes a misguided restoration of human privilege before the chaos of dynamic materialism, Gadda himself is not immune to its temptations. Describing his life as a “humiliated and offended being”, he characterizes his writing as an instrument of his rage with which he might “re-establish ‘my’ truth, ‘my’ way of seeing, namely, the instrument of vindication against the outrages of destiny” (2001, 94).

These manifold tensions and oppositions make Gadda an ideal literary case study for a consideration of the knots of posthumanism. Acknowledging as fact and, more importantly, as ethical code a human enmeshment in a world of infinite and dynamic relation, he opens his texts onto a geological temporality in which, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes, the “*human* immediately becomes *posthuman* as a consequence of the enlarged temporal frame that geology demands” (2015, 60). Yet, Gadda does not overlook the pain occasioned by the temporal limits and the vulnerability of human life. He may frequently and mercilessly satirize bourgeois constructions of a demarcated and self-interested human identity, but he is fully and furiously aware of the tragedies and indignities of anthropic time. As we arrive at the end of the *Pasticciaccio*, Gadda categorically understands that the “narrating subject” of reality is more-than-human (Iovino and Oppermann 2012, 459), but the single human death occurring in these pages still prompts anguish.

⁸ Gadda provides an extreme example of this tendency in Gonzalo Pirobutirro, the protagonist of *Acquainted with Grief*, whose phobic and furious occupation of his family’s villa becomes an attempt to affirm his “sacrosanct private, most private, mine, mine!” (1969, 90).

The house itself performs this tension as the two sections to follow, written from apparently opposing perspectives, will suggest. Assunta's hovel contains and encloses but also permits penetration and opening; it is in a state of time-induced decay but also perhaps hybridization. And, as one man lies dying within, his human body connecting across species and time periods, Gadda seems to ask of his posthuman framework: who will be left to read this material text of reality?

2. MONADIC HOUSES AND ANTHROPIC TIME

Assunta Crocchiapani's home is in a state of decay. The walls have lost their original pink colouring and are now characterized by a "faded squalor" on all but one rust covered wall (2007, 378-79). The roof tiles appear as stumps and the roof as a whole appears softened and heat-swollen, ready to fly away in a strong gust of wind (379). The shutters are "putrid" and "splintered" and the entire "rotten apparatus", looks ready to "fall and crash in a ruin" (379). The house, like Assunta's father within, is dying; the festering structure mirrors a barely conscious body covered in bed sores and filth. The house also replicates the wary and angry apprehension of its other inhabitant, Assunta. The windows are not transparent; the frames contain no glass but are sealed with greased paper or iron (379). Shutters are "half-closed" or they are slamming shut; a window opens and is immediately closed again; the door is small and, when the policemen demand entry, it opens only a crack (378-9).

This hovel, like many of the other homes detailed across Gadda's texts, from Gonzalo's obsessively guarded villa to Liliana's well-ordered, bourgeois apartment within the chaotic building on Via Merulana, suggests the borders of the individuated subject and illuminates his or her relation with a broader reality. Gadda seems to underscore this possibility as he describes Assunta's home as being "slightly separated from the flock" (2007, 378). Moreover, his insistence on closed, closing, and opaque windows suggests Leibniz's description of the monad as an indivisible unit of substance that has "no windows through which something can enter or leave" (1989, 214). Yet, as Gadda's theorization of the self of relation addressed above illustrates, this impenetrable configuration is not, to his mind, an ethical state of being⁹. Indeed, Gadda's subjectivity resonates more fully with Alfred

⁹ In *Meditazione milanese* Gadda plots a project of heuristic becoming that locates the ethical position beyond the borders of the demarcated subject *N* corresponds to the

North Whitehead's "actual occasion", a creature "constituted by its totality of relationships" (1979, 80)¹⁰. The impenetrability here of the monad suggests then the subject's misguided efforts at self-preservation, an attempt to extract itself from the dynamism of *becoming* to lay claim to a more stable *being*.

This monadization, however, is not just the arrogant posture of the eponymous egoist of Gadda's aforementioned essay, but is also the posture of one subjected to an "oltraggio" or outrage, a recurrent term in Gadda's oeuvre. Having probably played an indirect role in Liliana's murder, Assunta is not a pure victim. Yet, as Ingravallo and his colleagues close in on her squalid home, they are figured as black-clad grave-diggers (2007, 378). Their presence constitutes a menace even to the humans, dogs, and hens outside the hovel (378). Declaring themselves in no uncertain terms, the police officers demand entry: "Police! Let us in! Open the door!" (378). Theirs is an aggressive penetration of Assunta's monadic hovel and self; Ingravallo, in his capacity as officer of the law, observes her with a "steady, cruel eye" and Assunta's frowning face manifests wrath "as if at an unforeseen outrage" (381-2). The house, specifically the staircase, "creaks" under the weight of the officers as they move towards the room of the dying man (382). Here the law, and certainly not for the first time in the text, is figured as a violence or indignity toward the subject¹¹. Like the hovel, the subject buckles and warps, trampled by police officers in zealous pursuit of the identity of the guilty party and, presumably, the subsequent punishment of the same. As such the investigative paradigm comes to resemble an especially brutal version of the methodological dilemma described in *Meditazione milanese*: "[...] to know is to insert something into reality and it is, therefore, to deform that reality" (249).

Though a policeman, Ingravallo seems attuned to the deformative pain wrought by his investigation. In effect, he seems sadly aware that his search for the guilty party constitutes a cruel penetration of the monadic human subject figured here as semi-sealed hovel. He grasps the necessity

subject's attempt to preserve a stable identity: "[...] it is [...] to persist, to be I" (146). $N + 1$ represents an ethically preferable state that often requires self-sacrifice to access a sphere of becoming or "superconsciousness, supersystem" (146). $N - 1$ is the ignoble configuration epitomized by, amongst others, the murderer who, in obeying his greed, negates all human connectedness (149).

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze provides a comparison of Leibniz and Whitehead (1993).

¹¹ The *Pasticciaccio* offers multiple examples of this tendency. These include not just the examination of Liliana's corpse but also the reaction of Filippo Angeloni, who, when interrogated after the jewel robbery and despite his innocence, withdraws into himself such that his face becomes "a mute and desperate protest against the inhumanity, the cruelty of all organized investigation" (47).

of his role; he is "harsh, as he was required to be" because, as policeman and as enraged friend to the victim, he hears, in his "atrociously wounded spirit", Liliana calling for justice from "her sea of shadows" (2007, 381-2). Yet, as he sees on Assunta's forehead the fold formed by an angry frown, a fold that recalls both Liliana's wounded throat and the furrow of her sex which he discerned through her underwear as he scrutinized her corpse, his final sentiment is one, "almost", of repentance (388). Assunta enfolds Liliana, and Ingravallo seems stricken. His investigation and its punitive consequences suggest a second murder and this time Assunta is the victim¹². Perhaps this dilemma is the reason behind the famously inconclusive ending of the *Pasticciaccio*¹³. Leaving readers without our curiosity satisfied, Gadda draws us back toward human suffering and the manifold indignities of anthropic time, not only through Assunta's outrage but also and much more materially through the agonies of her father.

We learn virtually nothing of the life and character of Assunta's father. What we do know is that he is dying, that he is covered in bedsores, that his room smells horrendous, and that, in his suffering, the man embodies sickness itself and is referred to simply as "the Illness" (2007, 383). Death has stripped him of all distinguishing features and personality traits; it is not only unclear whether he is alive or dead, but even his gender, despite his beard, is no longer self-evident (383). Discussing a scene from Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* in which a detested character is found on the threshold of death and treated with care until he recovers, Gilles Deleuze argues for the force of a de-individuated life, "freed from the accidents of inner and outer life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens" (qtd. in Smith 1997, xiii). But for Gadda this specific man's impending death suggests not that Deleuzian vital immanence that resonates with material dynamism, but a geological temporality that is terrifying in its vastness. Indeed, speaking temporally, while the investigative paradigm murders subjective particularity with the pinpoint temporality of a uniform application of one law to all beings, this death dwarfs human existence with its infinite scale.

Assunta's father's body lies fleshless; his is a "bony and cachetic face" which, "motionless" on the pillow, is a "yellow-brown like something in an

¹² Discussing detective fiction, Tzvetan Todorov cites Michel Butor's fictional Burton who claims that all detective fiction is "based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective" (1977, 44).

¹³ In a 1968 interview with Dacia Maraini, Gadda stressed the novel's literary completeness, claiming that Ingravallo knows who the murderer is and that is enough (Gadda 1993, 171-2).

Egyptian museum” (2007, 383). Only the whiteness of his beard reveals him as belonging to an “era of human history painfully close” (383). As the man nears death his body is on the verge of entering into that material dynamism of infinite possibility open to the jewels. He too hurtles back to antiquity through his resemblance to ancient Egyptian objects while his beard keeps him bound to the present. Veronica Migliarini, the elderly woman who attends him, appears to be already part of this temporal and spatial vastness. Not only is her posture compared with that of Pontormo’s Cosimo de Medici but her face with its “dry, lizardy skin” gives her the “wrinkled immobility of a fossil” and the air of a “hundred-and-ninety-year-old Aztec woman” (385). But pain marks the man’s death, and his entry into the infinite dynamism of matter will strip him violently of his sentience, his self-consciousness, and his intentionality. As such, this broader temporality acquires a decidedly menacing, even vampiric quality. Eternity, Gadda writes, is already bent over him and her gulping down of saliva prompts a comparison with the “greedy gaze of a Red Cross woman” or a “slightly necrophiliac” nurse overly keen to administer “perpetual immunization” (384-5). Veronica, a “true icon” perhaps of geological time, barely sees the present; her gaze offers a “spent quiet” which is “opposed to the event, like the mindless memory of the earth, from paleontological distances” (385). But this telluric memory without mind is one that, as Cohen writes concerning stone, “hurts” the human and not only because rocks “so easily become hurled weapons” (2015, 79). Specifically, stone’s temporality and more broadly that of the earth hurts humans by diminishing the scale of our existence (Cohen 2015, 79). Hubristically happy at the top of our own species hierarchy, we are reduced, before the “mindlessness” of telluric or geological time, to the status of the proverbial mayfly. We are impelled towards the painful realization that we are not the measure of all things and that, tragically, we, as beings “with mind”, must die.

3. NOMADIC HOUSES AND POSTHUMAN TIME

As her father lies dying, Assunta Crocchiapani’s house is alive. Alongside the unfolding human tragedy of the father’s death, the material dynamism of the space around the feeble figure reverberates with posthuman significance. Re-entering the home of the dying man, this time with an eye to these nonhuman actors, we find that Ingravallo encounters that man whose species, gender, and vital state (described above) are indiscernible, a figure who is both in a coma and pulsing with “strange borborygms” that suggest

“miraculous imminence” (2007, 385). Reexamining the description of the father, we move through an architecture of death that parallels the space of the house in which he lays dying. The sheet and blankets on the bed rise and float with the man’s shaky breaths (385); the “outstretched little body” crosses the borders between species to become like a “skinny cat in a sack set on the ground” (383). Both “motionless” and strangely mobile, the father and Veronica move towards becoming bone (383) and stone – “the wrinkled immobility of a fossil” (385). But in Gadda, stone moves.

In fact a posthuman family greets the police brigade on the threshold of the house, where they find an interspecies assemblage of “kids, chickens, two women, two mongrel dogs with tails curled up like a bishop’s crook, revealing all their beauty” (2007, 378). The gleaming black eyes that peer at them could potentially belong to any of this mass, and no one can answer Di Pietrantonio’s question regarding “Who’s here?” with any precision. There are not just creatures animating the landscape around the house, though; the house itself moves and shifts before our eyes. Before the threshold are slabs of stone “hollowed by footsteps, and shoes, and nails” (378). The north wind has created “dark rust and shadows” on one side of the house; the roof tiles are “wavy” and grass grows on them; drops fall from the tiles; windows and shutters slam shut but also, significantly, open; a tree twists through the garret, serving as a beam and suturing together indoors and outdoors (379). The Crocchiapani house speaks (by creaking), stinks, waves, rots, and splinters, showing its dynamism and “the evaporation of the years” (379). In this sense, it moves beyond its monadic status to become an architectural nomad, which challenges readers to engage in nomadic thought in the terms described by Rosi Braidotti. Nomadic thought, she says, turns the thinking subject “into the threshold of gratuitous (principle of non-profit), aimless (principle of mobility or flow) acts which express the vital energy of transformative becoming (principle of non-linearity)” (2013, 166-7). Recounting the house and its curvilinear, mobile lines, the novel lingers on a posthuman threshold that once again defers “progressing” towards the resolution of the crime to instead focus on the vital, and dirty, dynamism of matter.

The Crocchiapani house’s nomadic “squalor” presses against the closure of the windowless monad. Suggestively recalling the “pasticciccio” or “awful mess” of the book’s title, it is a far cry from many of the Edenic and experimental spaces described in Harrison’s posthuman architectural experiments, which float over cities (Yona Friedman’s Spatial City, 1960, designed to hover over Paris) or envelop them in clouds of purified water vapor (the Blur building). Instead, the Crocchiapani residence helps uncover a “dirty” nonhuman universe, where alongside the tragedy

of individual human death, we find a form of decomposition that actively recomposes the landscape (as it nourishes literary composition). Throughout the text, dirty households provide a material connection between the shifting spaces of the investigation. Moving furniture in the house of Liliana Balducci after her murder, Ingravallo and his investigative team find dust (2007, 36); the uncooperative Zamira is encountered “pushing a broom, preceded by a conspicuous cluster of domestic fluffs and straws and indefinable rubbish” (277); the train just outside of Camilla Mattonari’s house sends up “cannonades of brown smoke from its spout” (306), and the tiny room in which she and her family lives smells of “the lipoids, the amino acids, the urea, the sweat, in short, in which the clothing of the poor is steeped” (314). These dirty spaces reflect the pervasive mobility of dirt, which is, as Heather Sullivan shows convincingly, a kind of a cyborg: “[...] the literal ground without which there would be no terrestrial life” but capable of exerting a “destructively agentic influence” on the things it touches (2012, 516). Recalling that the “human” is likely etymologically related to “humus”, or “living soil” (518), Sullivan argues for the hybrid, dynamic, nomadic qualities of dirt, and reminds us that dirt emerges from our bodies (516), which will return to dust. In the *Pasticciaccio*’s posthuman household, dirt, smoke, and sweat extend the houses’ thresholds outwards into the city of Rome and the countryside beyond, and they carry the threshold inwards into the human and nonhuman bodies. In sharp contrast with the violent, sudden death of Liliana, in fact, the father’s slow process of dying emphasizes the temporal arc that connects us all to humus.

In the nomadism of dirt, and in the nomadic, shifting household, the dying father has a chance at what Braidotti calls “an ethics of sustainability that aims at shifting the focus toward the positivity of *zoē*” (2010, 212). Although the Crochiapani house, and Gaddian spaces more generally, are often formed of hard, stony matter (think of that threshold, the gems, the nails, the beams), the movement of these objects through time and space, and the disintegration of many of them before our eyes, gives them an active “shapelessness” that recalls that of the Blur building, dramatizing, like it does, what Cary Wolfe claims “is true of all architectural forms” (2013, 129): that matter is mobile and open to interaction with the world. These objects thus point us to what Wolfe, pondering the moving, ephemeral architecture of the Blur vapor house, calls “the ultimate question: namely, who is doing the experiencing? Who – in phenomenological, ethical, and political terms – are ‘we’, exactly?” (2013, 121). The Gaddian universe, although indubitably concerned with the fate of the human subject, constantly reconfigures that “we” by way of the complicated knot of relations. In the final scene of the *Pasticciaccio*, dirt and stone contextualize the human

in a network of temporal encounters and crossings that are both metaphorical and, by way of our rooting in trans-corporeal flows, material: a human body is part cat and part Egyptian mummy; another is part lizard and part fossil; wood is part house and part coffin; death is part consignment to eternity and part rebirth as dirt. That worn stone on the threshold of the Crocchiapani house serves as a monumental reminder that "the world has never been still", and that humans "remain earth formed from earth, living upon the earth through alliance with earthen matter, returning at death to earth again" (Cohen 2015, 6).

What, then, might it mean to die in a nomadic, posthuman household? In a provocative article on *The Politics of "Life Itself" and New Ways of Dying*, Braidotti rethinks Agamben's notion of biopolitics, a concept that insists, she argues, on introducing "finitude as a constitutive element within the framework of subjectivity, which also fuels an affective political economy of loss and melancholia at the heart of the subject" (2010, 211). Contesting advanced capitalism's monetarization of death, or what she calls the "ideology of compensation" that leads to requests for damages to repay suffering (as in the case of the Shoah or Soviet communism), Braidotti wonders whether instead "death is overrated"? (212). Suggesting that death is "after all only another phase in a generative process" (212), Braidotti proposes that rather than "mutual reciprocity", which is the logic that drives capitalism, empathy, and the kind of "justice" that suggests that reparations can be made for atrocities, we need "mutual specification and mutual codependence" (214). Although posited in radical terms, this move intends to support an affirmative ethics, whereby the subject is "a frame for interaction and change, growth and movement" (215). Such an affirmative ethics is arguably discernable in Gadda's creative elisions of man and stone, dying father and living house. On his way to becoming-stone and becoming-house, Assunta's father is both infinite and nearing human finitude. And in the final paragraph of the book, Assunta's "splendid vitality", "undaunted faith", and "incredible cry" all serve to halt the linearity of the investigation, spiraling the novel back into the realm of dirty indeterminacy.

And so the *Pasticciaccio* closes (or opens) the door on a narrative architecture of polarity, where material and ontological tensions lead to both human and posthuman conclusions. Useful here are Cohen's moving reflections on Lindow Man, the body of a pre-Common Era man found in 1984 and now on permanent display in the British Museum, who was brutally murdered before being buried. Cohen describes himself hunched over the display case when his family arrives. While his son is impressed with how "cool" the ancient human remains are, his three-year-old daughter Katherine dissolves into tears asking if Lindow Man will be okay, becoming

distraught on learning that he is irretrievably dead (2015, 95-6). Lindow Man becomes a memento mori that reminds us of human mortality, but he also “incarnates a narrative with life”, namely the “endurance of the past”, albeit a disturbingly brutal one in this case. Cohen urges us to “refuse to petrify bodies into objects” and, more importantly, prevails upon us to avoid responding to the disorientation or the “loss of bearing” occasioned by stone’s longevity by mooring ourselves in human exceptionalism (97). Convinced, like Cohen, of the theoretical and ethical appeal of matter’s dynamism, Gadda remains nonetheless sensitive to the painful implications of the tragic finitude of the individual being. His writing certainly embraces those stone-induced qualities and tendencies Cohen describes as follows: “[...] stone’s endurance unsettles narration, curving linear narratives into vortices, limning history with havoc” (79). Like Cohen’s daughter, he mourns the fate of his literary Lindow Men. Yet like Cohen’s posthuman thinker, the *Pasticciaccio* also leaps “from ephemeral stabilities, from the diminutive boundedness of merely human tales” (3). That is why the houses that cannot contain the protagonists of the *Pasticciaccio* come to constitute protagonists in and of themselves. The stories of the many articulate beings, spaces, and forces across Gadda’s writing, from Fascism to jewels, from lavish meals to celery in a grocery bag, from clucking chickens to creative lightning strikes, trace the author’s meditations on the tragedy of being born into a world where there are so many voices to listen to that one human lifespan – or one household, or one novel – can never suffice.

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