

# Introduction

## Contemporary Italian Women Thinkers: Attending to Thinking, Extending the Art

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This volume brings together a diverse collection of philosophical essays written by contemporary Italian women—scholars, activists, in some cases both—who have made of the practice of thinking an integral part of their lives. Whether they teach and do research in academic settings or practice philosophy while engaging politics and the public world, these women exhibit a familiarity with thought and a *savoir faire* that demand attention.

The collection is unique in that it provides an opening onto a variety of perspectives in contemporary Italian thought rarely, if ever, displayed in the front window. If, at least until recently, translation into English of Italian philosophers has been slow, somewhat haphazard, and ultimately a niche, translation of philosophical works by Italian *women* thinkers has been even sparser, more random, and quite selective, ultimately precluding ease of access and the possibility of broad recognition. In Italy, the women thinkers featured in this collection are all highly respected, widely published, and justly renowned. In the global reality of our times, it is not unlikely that the English-speaking reader may have come across some of their names before. Some of these authors may indeed be already known through their translated work.<sup>1</sup> Many have taught or lectured outside Italy, and all have, no doubt, relations of various nature with colleagues in other parts of the world. Whereas it may come as no surprise that, in this volume, there are more voices than those one may be already familiar with, the reader may

nevertheless be surprised by the variety of writing styles, the breadth of the issues examined, or simply the thinking that is here exhibited. The outcomes of this all are for each reader to uncover, appraise, and relish.

Two features immediately stand out about the volume, if only by consideration of the book's title; namely, that it gathers essays by *women* thinkers and that these thinkers live and work in *Italy*. Indeed, gender and the geopolitical/cultural context provide the broader frame for this volume. In the current times of identity politics and dangerous nationalistic exclusionary policies, one cannot avoid thinking about gender and national identity, and think about them seriously one must. Nevertheless, we would like to caution against making hasty assumptions or coming to rushed conclusions about the overall content of the collection; instead, we would like to invite the reader to problematize the questions that the volume elicits and solicits.

To what extent does the geopolitical and cultural context wherein the essays in the collection originate provide a lens by which to read and understand the contents of this volume?

Does being a woman affect, and to what extent, the kind of philosophical truth delivered to the world?

These questions arise spontaneously and inevitably—invited by the title and reinforced by even a quick glance at authors' names and table of content—and gesture toward two possible paths for reading the book. Rather than eclipsing these queries through facile and ready-made answers one may already have available, what if one were to dwell on the issues, suspend one's views on the matter, and hold the questions near, keep them open, and return to them while reading the collection? The essays will not provide *a way* to answer these important queries. Yet they will offer us *ways* to problematize them further.

As said, the philosophers in this collection live and work in Italy. Italy is the place they call home, where they have established meaningful and long-standing relationships, where they engage and participate in many ways in the cultural, political, and academic life by teaching, writing, and engaging in public speaking. They share a common history, even though this history has many sides; they partake of a similar cultural milieu even when their personal and intellectual stories are different; and they live among buildings and palaces evocative of the past—a past that is diversified and mostly gone, but in some way still standing, casting its shadows into the present. They speak the same Italian language, in their different cadences reflecting the regions of their birth, and they are familiar with a landscape that morphs into plains, lakes, and mountains, that has drawn many from afar because of its reputation for beauty, and that has been referred to as

the “blue peninsula”—a strip of land that stretches into the Mediterranean sea and toward the countries, cultures, and peoples bordering its waters.

Appealing to the shared geopolitical and cultural background, one may try to situate these women’s thought—their approaches, themes, and methods—in relation to the philosophical works of other contemporary Italian thinkers one may be already familiar with and whose names are well known in the English-speaking world (such as Agamben, Esposito, Negri, or Vattimo, to name a few). A comparison would lead, no doubt, to identifying some interesting elements of parallelism, commonality, and contrast. Yet such an approach would also implicitly divert the light from the essays at hand. Seeking to identify some “resemblance” would be analogous to comparing, for instance, the Alps to the Rocky Mountains or the other way around. Of course, it can be done, but if that is how one looks at these geological formations, one sees neither the Alps nor the Rocky Mountains. One sees only what one thinks one already knows of them. Resemblance is a subtle way to trace back what one encounters to an already known place, to something familiar or to some starting point. It tells us something, provided that an origin or a source can be identified; but it also distracts us from what lies right in front of us. Once again, our invitation is to not take the path that sends us looking for what we already know, which results in measuring discrepancies and similarities, and instead keep the light focused on the essays (and their authors) themselves. One would then notice that each piece stands on its own and offers original threads that come to form unique and original compositions. It is as if, in each of them, new sites unravel just as, in moving through a landscape, new vistas open up. If one expects to come to a panoramic point from which to see all around, one may be disappointed. The essays stand together, yet each stands alone; there is no all-encompassing view to be gained in this volume.

Deliberately, these essays have not been written in response to a particular question, nor assembled with a theme in mind, not even with the sole aim of furnishing a window on the contemporary Italian philosophical scenario. The essays definitely give us a distinctive taste of the philosophical work that is done in Italy, but not in the sense that one gains a grand, overarching view. These essays do not lend themselves to a grasp of this kind. What they do, each in its own specificity and heterogeneity, is to take the reader along on a thinking exercise that is deeply involved and involving as well. Each essay shows how to think about the issue at hand, an issue that is representative of the long-term scholarly interests of its author and with which she continues to wrestle. Hence, what each essay offers and demands is far from being a superficial and detached reading exercise; on the contrary, the thinking each exemplifies leaves the reader

with a personal, participatory, and, at times, even intimate feeling toward its author.

Employing the Italian geopolitical, cultural context as a reading register does not lead to any one specific feature that alone could qualify this collection. Even if we were to consider the Italian language, which is the shared language in which these essays were originally written,<sup>2</sup> it would be hard to say what this linguistic commonality might mean concretely. Any spoken language is alive only insofar as it is interwoven with a lived environment. A pure language, that is, a language disconnected from its life-world, would require a process of distillation, a cleansing procedure that sanitizes it of its “impurities” such as accents, cadences, and the likes. Provided this were possible, if at all desirable, what one would obtain would be a “dead” language, a language no one speaks. It is instead clear that all the thinkers whose essays are collected here exhibit a love for the written word, an elegance of linguistic expression, a passion for practices, and an attention to the nuances of life in its many facets that remind us that philosophy does not speak by way of concepts alone. Rather, living philosophy speaks the language of embodied life.

“But I am a woman,” Luisa Muraro writes unflinchingly in her essay, and such an epiphany, which emerges from her embodied condition, turns her way of thinking around. Her exclamation resonates with the figure of Plato’s enchained prisoner who, after escaping from the dark cave, is turned around again and again, experiencing dizziness and disorientation; but finally, adjusting to the light of the sun, the now liberated captive comes to see clearly and sharply. For Muraro, being a woman is the unthought that requires being thought, and commands the creation of a language that makes sexual difference visible and real. To her, seeing clearly and sharply means being able to see the words and deeds of women, mostly unseen and forgotten by the tradition, and to bring them into the world. She writes that “if there is something true, right, good it can only enter the world by passing through the inner self of a free rational human being.”<sup>3</sup> Truth is subjective, she claims: it comes into the world in and through our very being. The authors of these essays are, indeed, all women. Even the last piece, the Coda—a conversation between Nidesh Lawtoo and Adriana Cavarero—places the work and thought of a woman, Cavarero herself, at the center of the dialogue.

The history of Italian women is fascinating and complex, and certainly too rich to be addressed in this introduction. It is nevertheless worth mentioning that the postwar Italian women’s liberation movements were strong and successful,<sup>4</sup> especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, in ushering in important legal and political recognitions in terms of civil law, equality,

and social and economic rights.<sup>5</sup> These legal and political successes remained however somewhat formal and did not fully translate, for Italian women, into cultural and structural transformations radically affecting the concrete, material realities of everyday life, thereby attesting to patriarchy's pervasive and obstinate stronghold on Italian society. Nonetheless and moving from diverse positions situated internally or externally to the establishment, women in Italy have persistently partaken in many intellectual and political activities—from writing to debating, from thinking to engaging in public dialogues, from mobilizing to creating spaces for alternative structures of learning and education.<sup>6</sup> Women's copious and relevant editorial work in some select presses, newspapers, and magazines alike illuminates yet again their indefatigable activism and their undeniable presence in the production of knowledge at large, in Italy, during the last decades. The Italian academic philosophical universe has stood out as an enclave particularly slow to change, with a small presence of women, especially at the highest academic ranks, and a widespread, if not unrelenting, indifference toward Women's/Gender Studies programs, which remain rare and few. The present volume attests to the vitality, creativity, and originality of Italian women thinkers, both within and outside the academic world—reminding us that there are more sites of knowledge than just the traditional ones.

Italian women's history aside, being *a woman* may be upheld, just like the Italian geopolitical and cultural context, as a possible lens through which to read this collection. It is undeniable that, as we have remarked, this volume shines light on the philosophical work of thinking women in Italy. Yet this does not, by itself, provide the sole or even privileged interpretative key to the entire collection. One detects a serious and unmistakable vein of critique across the texts, but this critique does not find its roots in the fact of being a woman *per se* or, at least, not for all the authors in the volume. In other words, this volume does not present a collection of feminist essays or, better, not in its entirety. The first three chapters comprising part one—by Luisa Muraro, Maria Luisa Boccia, and Lea Melandri, respectively—certainly place the question of being a woman forefront and at the center of the discussion, notably with regard to the role of “the maternal.” Muraro explicitly examines the topic of being a woman, as mentioned before. Boccia speaks of the “irreplaceable womb” that cannot be ignored in the new era of artificial reproductive technologies, and where at stake is still the question of female freedom. The maternal, in the form of a symbolic, is also where, for Melandri, the struggle between women's liberation—rooted in women's struggle for a freedom outside and beyond established male paradigms—and emancipation—which rests on equality achieved through formal changes in the law<sup>7</sup>—carries on. Is the maternal

the site of a new frontier? Is it the old redressed in new clothes? Melandri's chapter spurs us to reflect on these critical questions.

The maternal, women's freedom, and woman subjectivity are not the primary focus of the chapters in the subsequent parts of the volume. Nonetheless, questions relating to freedom, subjectivity, and (political and ethical) responsibility remain central throughout the volume, and they are approached and examined artfully and freely without any neat tie to a specific philosophical approach or school of thought. The phenomenological method, the hermeneutic strategy, the poststructuralist approach, the deconstructionist angle, and the feminist and critical attitude are all present in some form, at times joined together in inspiring configuration; none of them is however active in such a predominant way as to define the collection in its entirety. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that these chapters defy all categorization of this type, thus displaying a freedom and ingenuity of thinking that are truly remarkable.

A host of past and contemporary philosophers of diverse temporal, geographical, and conceptual backgrounds (Freud, Heidegger, Plato, Ricoeur, Weil, Schleiermacher, Simmel, Arendt, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Patočka, Foucault, to name just a few in no specific order) are deftly summoned as interlocutors, and we, the readers, feel summoned as well, picking up on the urgency of what is at stake at every turn of the page. The texts are rich, solidly grounded, manifold, refreshing, surprising. Even when the authors masterfully practice the art of detailed reading of other thinkers, they never simply provide us with a commentary; rather, they approach the texts with a specific concern in mind and so as to take us elsewhere, where we perhaps do not expect. It is as if, through them, one discovers new corners or hidden hooks one had no idea they were there, like playing hide-and-seek, but where the author is not searching for who is hiding; rather, she goes after interstices that dilate and augment the thinking space. "See here?" "And here?" the authors prod the reader, who may be starting to feel slightly unsettled at the continuously new openings, not unlike Plato's prisoner or Muraro's subject at the realization that things are different from what they were initially imagined to be.

In a way, these chapters invite the reader to take hold of the destabilizing effects of thinking. Nothing stands firm when one thinks; everything starts moving. Are we prepared to move with these essays? It is, after all, like a dance. If one worries about not knowing all the steps, one will not get up and dance. But movement, and moving along is what is at stake and all that really matters. Even the pace of the essays is anything but monotonous. It feels slow and tranquil in some, frenzy and hasty in others. These essays are an invitation to engage the art of thinking as if in a dance. For

the reader, the point is to move along, to look and see, feel and savor the varying qualities of each piece as it unfolds the art of thinking.

The essays insist, in one way or another, on a close-knit relation between thinking and practice, on the need for a philosophy of and for the world, and on the necessity to engage with everyday life. Underlining these women's thinking is the implicit recognition that the available set of tools inherited from the philosophical tradition is insufficient for thinking through the issues of the day. To employ Simona Forti's term, there is a tinge of "dissidence" and, perhaps, even impertinence in their thinking, in that these thinkers question the delimitations of the art of philosophizing. They "sit apart" from given ways of thought, they reconsider established approaches, they problematize issues in novel and original manners. And they do so while plunging fully into their quests. Theirs is an odd exercise of distancing in immersion—distancing from given parameters while immersing themselves in thinking through these quests anew. It is an exercise that dis-tends, ex-tends, and at-tends to thinking and stretches its reach. A bow has to be carefully and artfully pulled for the arrow to hit the distant mark. Could it be that the given ways of philosophy are a too-tight and constraining bow for a thinking subject whose subjectivity could not even surge as a question for much of the past philosophical tradition? This question emerges powerfully and suggestively from this collection.

Perhaps we come here, with this question, to a common place, to a site of togetherness of all the essays that is better expressed in an image: that of a major Italian piazza, which is where all main roads converge or from which they all depart. It seems that to get wherever each is going, the authors of these essays have to pass through the main piazza. Maybe they have come to the piazza after meandering elsewhere. It is here, though, that they find their bearings: what road to take, or not to take, in order to get more directly to where they intend to go. The piazza, defined by notable and ancient buildings that delimit its perimeter and cannot be ignored and by the large opening that is offered in their midst, is a place that gathers, a place of togetherness where the old and the new, the individual and the public, the personal and the political, the familiar and the unexpected, the given and the hoped for meet. The buildings' old grandness is both intimidating and outdated; perhaps it is decayed, but the space they open up by close proximity and differing styles, a testament to their age, is inviting and alluring, a promise of new relations and negotiations. One could say that these essays fashion and refashion the piazza, if not in its buildings, at least in the ways they articulate the subject that moves through that space.

This subject—a recurrent theme in many of the essays—is far from being an isolated and abstract entity, indifferent and cold, uniform and universal.

There is an urgency running through the essays about various challenges of our time the subject cannot ignore—from immunitary politics to the surge of fascist movements, from modern technologies to new forms of control, from environmental and humanitarian crises to the call for new forms of responsibility, action, and vision. The subjectivity discussed here is rather porous, shaped and reshaped by the winds of time and by the encounters with the other(s) to which it is exposed. The carvings are unmistakable, and the piazza takes on different looks in light of them. In another sense, what these authors do is something that may not seem likely or possible, namely, enlarging the piazza and extending its space.

Will the old buildings have to come down? Maybe, but not necessarily. Perhaps what such old buildings need is to become passages to other kinds of spaces, ensure that their walls are not completely sealed off and can be furnished with gateways or arches that transform the wall into a “*via*,” a passageway, a path that connects to another site, a different kind of space, but still one we can partake in and share. Or, yet again, the work of these essays is about opening new piazzas and multiplying the spaces that create the opportunity to meet and interact—spaces that, in turn, may and can transform whoever takes part in the encounter.

Let us briefly consider the kinds of subjectivity these essays set forth. Here, the subject is embodied and vulnerable, relational and changing. It is not the self-sufficient, self-created, and autonomous subject that has dominated much of the modern philosophical tradition; nor is it the impersonal or nomadic self of postmodernity, although there are some echoes of that. It is hard to pin down a model of subjectivity that reflects the various forms subjectivity takes from one essay to the other. It is clear, though, that the subject, as a philosophical concept, is a site of continuous sculpting. Simona Forti suggests a Socratic type of subjectivity that defies all forms of affirmative identities: in the inner dialogue of the two-in-one nothing goes unquestioned, showing a relationality and a plurality at the very core of each of us that demands practices. Relationality is constitutive of our humanity, says Adriana Cavarero, and that means that we are exposed, we lean out. Considering how each of us comes into the world, completely dependent on and at the mercy of another being, makes the notion of a self-sufficient and self-created subject crumble. Relationality and vulnerability go hand in hand, one is not self-enclosed, but open. Elena Pulcini speaks of a relational subject too, an emotional subject that is in relation with itself, but not in such a way as to close others off. Rather, the emotional subject lets itself be displaced by the other(s) and in so doing becomes another, in an ongoing process of self-transcending. In evoking the migrant, in a time of increasing nationalistic policies intent on keeping others out, Caterina

Resta reminds us, very concretely, that total displacement is directly tied to a conception of identity as pure and intact. But citizenship cannot be the result of artificial enclosures (can it?), and the migrant or the undocumented person is not any less human for being on the outside of some borders, or some laws, despite having been turned into an anonymous and unspecified entity precisely by those walls and laws. Rather than an impassable barrier that separates, the border needs to be thought of as threshold that relates and connects. Are we capable of this kind of metamorphosis, where we are transformed by the encounter with those that are foreign and come from the outside? Are we up to a vision of relations and connectedness, rather than of division and separation?

These are the kind of questions the essays collected in this volume provoke. They draw us in and keep our hold. After we are done with the reading, the questions are not done with us. The thinking at work here is about attending to and extending, connecting and relating. In the words of Maria Cristina Bartolomei, it is about seeing the connection between action and symbol, it is about seeing the “in-between”; something was there, but no longer is, and nevertheless, or precisely because of that, such a lack points, tends to something beyond, something that is not. This tending is rooted in a “radical interrogation of everyday life,” writes Enrica Lisciani Petrini. The everyday, what has been marginalized by a dominant philosophy of transcendence, is the *locus* of this thinking. The view from the everyday is opaque, neither pure nor clear as it is assumed to be when regarded from above. It is only from this close-knit quarters that one can see and probe the tensions, where by “tension” one should understand the ways in which the different forms play out in relation to one another and stretch the ways one thinks about what is being thought.

Let us return to the topic of subjectivity to discover some of the specific tensions that are therein implicated and exemplified. Cavarero affirms a subjectivity that is both relational and vulnerable, one that is exposed and dislodged from its vertical axis by leaning toward the other. At the same time, Cavarero reiterates the subject’s uniqueness and distinctiveness that are revealed in responding to the other’s call, without becoming one with the other. How is this uniqueness revealed and maintained in a subject that morphs and changes under the dislocation caused by the encounter with the other, as Pulcini discusses, in an incessant process of “self-renewing”? Both Cavarero and Pulcini speak of a relational subject, and not of a self-referential or a self-enclosed one; yet the relationality at work in these two thinkers does not lend to the same subjectivity. And what about the new form of collective subject that Laura Bazzicalupo discusses in her chapter, produced by biopower not through disciplinary methods but rather in and

through neoliberal forms? These subjectivities are aggregates described as bottom-up experiments, she writes; they fluctuate and resist being locked in an identity status. This presents, yet again, a different kind of subjectivity, if we can still call it “a subject,” and this may be just one of the underlining tensions this collection uncovers.

Other tensions disclosed in these essays stem from our entanglement with the world, in and through our material embodiment. Questions of freedom, liberation, and responsibility arise out of our embodied experience, whose thickness and density reveal political, ethical, and historical grains. There may be an objective and impersonal way of understanding freedom, disentangled from all that inheres to lived experience; that path is not pursued in these essays, though. Instead, tensions emerging from embodied life are laid bare and probed: between mother and woman, between mother and womb, between liberation and emancipation, between identity and uniqueness, between desubjectivation and becoming a subject, between migrant and citizen, just to name a few.

It is fitting to say that these essays question, in one way or another, the rigidity and the enclosures of traditional philosophy as a way of thinking that usually operates via a given set of concepts and categories. They present and exemplify a way of thinking that is agile, open, and subtle. It is not an openness that makes everything the same; rather, it is an openness that does not disdain anything as *unphilosophical* and does not refrain from exploring it thoughtfully and inquisitively. Life in all its concrete and varied dimensions is where thinking demurs. From there, thinking moves in and out of such concreteness without ever abandoning it entirely. Without offering final and definitive answers, this way of thinking invites us to pause, to dwell and reflect on many facets and on how they interlace in the issue at hand. If a vision is provided, it is neither static nor final.

Each essay has its own specific way of “wooing” us without making us fall captive. We are drawn, but not coerced; we are in its net, but not caught. In her essay on responsibility, Laura Boella argues that the question is about “being here,” being present and taking the initiative, recalling a life that is exposed and not self-centered, but also a life that is in “active tension.” In the broad variety of timely and urgent questions gathered in this volume, as well as in the manifold approaches herein displayed, these essays make manifest a way of thinking that delves into tensions. They exemplify an exercise that is enchanted neither with transcendence and purity, nor with a conception of philosophy founded on a hierarchization of life. These essays remind us that there is no separating philosophy from life; rather, philosophy is about delving into life’s depths. We tend to look at tensions as problems that need some form of resolution or reconciliation.

But, as these chapters display, in attending to tensions, thinking dis-tends and ex-tends the philosophical art.



The volume has been organized around four conceptual clusters—each highlighting distinct yet interconnected themes—followed by a Coda. Part One, “Women, Mothers, Bodies,” centers on topics relating to the configuration of women’s identity and subjectivity, challenging traditionally patriarchal procedures of philosophizing in light of women’s experience. This is, admittedly, the most overtly feminist of all the sections, and, at times, it does not shy away from personal considerations providing a refreshing breath of air in an often asphyctic, overly exegetic and argumentative way of doing philosophy. The part opens with an essay by Luisa Muraro, “The Inner Passage.” The core of this chapter—and, for Muraro, the challenge for our times—lies in the question: What happens to thought when faced with something unthought? Starting from the statement recalled earlier, “But I am a woman,” and drawing on Descartes’ method of making his own thinking “the inner passage” that ushers in the modern world, Muraro argues for women’s politics as an intersubjective practice that begins from within, liberates women’s desire, names the real in ways other from those that are already known, and imagines ways of living otherwise and elsewhere.

The unthought that Muraro so fervently invokes returns in the next chapter under the guise of the maternal with which women’s identity has often and too readily been assimilated. Through a critical consideration of the controversial concept of the “irreplaceable womb,” in “Who Is a Mother?” Maria Luisa Boccia considers the effects that the new reproductive technologies have on the meaning of motherhood. The destabilizing role they ultimately play, Boccia argues, complicates the concept of the maternal and opens the way for the possibility of reconfiguring the meaning of being a woman, deconstructing female identity, and getting rid of motherhood as “destiny” through the dissociation of the figures of the woman, the mother, the biological mother, and the person who loves and cares for a child.

The figure of the mother makes a crucial appearance also in Lea Melandri’s “Aporias of the Maternal in the Women’s Movement.” The question at the basis of Melandri’s reflection focuses on the notion of the maternal and its ability to operate as a meaningful factor for positive changes and transformations. The question Melandri provocatively consigns us is whether a mere value shift—from negative to positive—in the understanding of the maternal may be sufficient to transform the cause of women’s traditional

exclusion from public life into an opportunity for women's affirmation, liberation, and empowerment.

Part Two extends the reflections relating to themes of women's identity to a consideration of topics of subjectivity, power, and the political as philosophical concepts broadly understood. In "Toward an Ethos of Freedom: Notes on Subjectivity and Power," Simona Forti raises the question of how to (re)think a notion of subjectivity that, while not being oblivious to relations of power, can be free by enacting forms of resistance against external pressures and constraints. The underlying conviction of Forti's analysis of the figure of Socrates as it appears in texts by Arendt, Foucault, and Patočka is that, to prevent power from becoming domination, political action must be the visible manifestation of an ethics of freedom as the articulation of an anti-fascist practice of life.

The political concern in relation to practices of power, government, and processes of subjectivation is also at the center of Laura Bazzicalupo's "Biopolitics and Economy: Between Self-Government Practices and New Forms of Control." Neoliberal rationality is a form of biopolitics, Bazzicalupo argues, as it governs through the production of processes of subjectivation whose ethos is economic, that is, based on an organizational logic (an economy) that substitutes the modern juridical-political logic based on formal, exclusionary, and dualist law with an unlimited, yet highly selective inclusiveness. This functional system produces the imaginary of self-government and lives' productive power, yet it also exposes such lives to the *ex post* control of evaluation and rating, thereby implying, Bazzicalupo warns, deeply problematic consequences for democratic forms of representation.

The preceding considerations of themes of subjectivity and processes of subjectivation are enriched by the explicit appearance of the other—in the form of the migrant—in Caterina Resta's "Immunitary Politics." In Europe, Resta notes, various forms of "immunitary" politics and sovereigntisms have recently emerged, that is, new nationalistic policies based on the fear of contamination by foreign elements—the migrants—seen as a threat to cultural identity and economic wealth. Confronted with this situation and following Derrida's notion of "topolitics," Resta calls for an examination of the very character of sovereignty understood in the form of the connection between sovereignty, ipseity, identity, membership, and territory. Only by deconstructing this nexus and pointing to the need to remain vulnerable, no matter the challenges and risks, will it be possible to imagine new forms of citizenship and planetary cohabitation, Resta courageously concludes.

Whereas Part Two has a somewhat distinctly sociopolitical flavor, Part Three revisits some of the same themes and concerns yet this time from a perspective of individual involvement inclined in an ethical and

practical direction. What constitutive elements need to be at work in the individual to orient subjectivity possibly to generate the new forms of world cohabitation invoked by Resta at the end of Part Two? In “Responsibility as Being Here in Our Own Time,” Laura Boella notes how, in contemporary thought, the generative source of ethics has become responsibility, which thinkers such as Jan Patočka and Karel Kosík address through the conceptual figure of one’s “presence at one’s own time” or the courage “to be here.” This figure of responsibility appears also in the work of the perhaps little known Swiss thinker Jeanne Hersch. Boella notices the “heretical” value of these still largely unexplored reflections, and argues that the essential moment of responsibility understood as “being here” consists of placing oneself at the center of the contradictions between individual behavior and macroeconomic/technological processes, institutions, needed beliefs, and disappointed hopes.

The need for a change, a revision, or at least an update of the traditional philosophical vocabulary and, more specifically, the thematization of a notion of subjectivity that is capable of meeting the challenges of its time continue in Elena’s Pulcini’s “Emotional Subjects: For the Care of the Future.” Confronted with the many global challenges that threaten the future of the living world, philosophy’s only chance to avoid literally becoming world-less is to renew itself, Pulcini argues. This urgently needed renewal invests primarily the subject, which needs to be redefined, according to Pulcini, as an interrelational subjectivity based on *passions* regarded as the relational structures par excellence. Understanding the passions is the prelude to the education and cultivation of those positive emotions Pulcini defines as “empathic passions,” that is, those passions that are urgently needed to preserve the possibility of the world future.

The need for alternative conceptual categories and for a reorientation toward affective modes of existence capable of gesturing toward the unthought—a notion that returns, albeit in a different form, from previous chapters in Part One—are some of the themes central to Part Four. In “Everyday Life: For a Vision without Transcendences,” Enrica Lisciani-Petrini focuses on reclaiming the notion of everyday life and the productive force intrinsic in this idea. Starting already in the mid-nineteenth century, the category of the “everyday” has imposed itself to philosophical and also artistic thinking, Lisciani-Petrini remarks, thereby shifting the focus from the heights of the rigid protocols of “pure reason” to the lowliness of everyday life considered in its unavoidable material and impersonal interconnections. The shift is accompanied by a changed methodology, which is now aimed at exposing the inescapable complexity of reality in its everyday passing and is situated at the intersection of various linguistic registers—art, politics,

anthropology, philosophy, fashion, marketing, and advertisements. This approach is not distant, Lisciani-Petrini concludes, from the “impure reason” that, for many, characterizes that trend of Italian thinking recently become known as “Italian thought.”

The invitation to resist ways of thinking that reduce philosophy to purely abstract, cognitive, or conceptual modalities and the desire to assign to thinking more active and affective functions that nevertheless are not closed to transcendence are central to Maria Cristina Bartolomei’s “The Symbol in Action.” Drawing on Paul Ricoeur and Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher, Bartolomei looks at the symbol not from a cognitive perspective but from the dimension of action. This leads to acknowledge that the way in which symbols work is by acting, by fulfilling a communicative and affective function that allows the receiver of the symbolic action to lean toward the unthought. According to Bartolomei, the symbol maintains a circular and dialectical relation between various dimensions (words and things, precision and stratification of meanings, the symbol’s singularity and the symphonic dimension of its horizon, timelessness and historical and cultural rootedness) and ultimately, as theorized by Ricoeur, it acts in the sense of being an occasion for and spur toward the exercise, practice, and activity of thinking.

The volume concludes with a Coda—an interview with Adriana Cavarero conducted by Nidesh Lawtoo. Not an extemporaneous addition but rather a vibrant testimony and exemplification of the relational subjectivity and collaborative practices of thinking evoked in many of the previous chapters, in “Mimetic Inclinations: A Dialogue with Adriana Cavarero,” the Italian thinker responds to Lawtoo’s own interest in the role played by the ancient concept of *mimēsis* in the articulation of Cavarero’s political thought. In the dialogical space that opens up, Cavarero provides a terse and vivid overview of some major themes that characterize her philosophy. On the background of authors that span from Hannah Arendt to Plato, Karen Blixen, Elias Canetti, Émile Zola, and Emmanuel Levinas among others, she intersects themes that are at the heart of her work, but that also resonate with many topics of this volume. Through her method of “stealing,” Cavarero recovers from the depths of a forgetful tradition voices that resound in a new polyphony—the subject, the other, the woman, the mother, the everyday, the political, the body, responsibility. Cavarero’s Arendtian conclusion, which can be aptly applied to this volume as a whole, is that, in polyphony, individualities do not dissolve because “uniqueness and plurality are just two categories that implicate one another reciprocally.”<sup>8</sup>



At the end of the journey this volume takes through the reflections and positions advanced by these remarkable Italian women thinkers, each distinct in her individuality and yet in relation with the others, one certainly has a sense of the novelty of concepts, the expansion of themes, the subtlety of analysis, the rigor of thought, and the commitment to practice that these authors bring to contemporary philosophy, Italian and beyond. It is our hope as editors that the dance to which they invite us and the piazzas in which they welcome us may not only be enjoyed and treasured but also urge us toward ways of thinking that are daring, creative, and resilient.

## Notes

1. One can find information on works by these women thinkers available in English translation in the contributors' notes at the end of the volume.

2. The editors would like to point out that this is also the case for the conversation between Nidesh Lawtoo and Adriana Cavarero, the "Coda"; this conversation too took place in Italian.

3. Luisa Muraro, "The Inner Passage," Part One, p. 24.

4. Women's right to vote was established in Italy in 1945, and Italian women were able to vote for the first time that year in local administrative elections where they were held. Women voted for the first time at the national level in 1946 in the referendum that established Italy as a Republic; twenty-one women, the so-called *madri costituenti* [constituent mothers], were elected to be part of the constituent assembly, made of a total of 556 members, and five women participated in the committee of seventy-five individuals that wrote the Italian constitution.

5. For example, the right to equal pay in factories in 1961, retirement benefits for housewives and equal access to all professions, including courts of law, in 1963, the legitimation of divorce in 1970, the creation of daycare facilities to help working mothers in 1971, a new family law in 1975, a law on equal treatment in matters of work in 1977, and the legalization of abortion in 1978.

6. These activities were carried out through mixed groups of men and women, communities of women alone, collectives of self-reflection and consciousness raising, and gave rise to numerous initiatives such as the various *Casa delle Donne* [Women's House] in many Italian towns, the *Libreria delle Donne* [Women's Bookstore] and the *Libera Università delle Donne* [Women's Free University] in Milan, the Diotima group in Verona, and many others.

7. The feminist struggle in Italy has seen the debate over emancipation versus liberation taking center stage over the years. The question at the heart of this debate is complex and would require more space than this introduction allows. Suffice it to say that while emancipation rests on the struggle for equality in and through recognition of rights and legislation reform, the struggle for liberation considers women's freedom independently from male (or universal) notions of equality and

legal reforms. The three essays in Part One by Muraro, Boccia, and Melandri refer to this debate: Muraro and Boccia do so implicitly and Melandri in a more explicit way. See Melandri, "Aporias of the Maternal in the Women's Movement," p. 48.

8. Adriana Cavarero/Nidesh Lawtoo, "Mimetic Inclinations: A Dialogue with Adriana Cavarero," p. 197.