DIOTIMA'S MOTHER, AND HER COMMUNITY

This volume presents some of the most significant writings by four distinctive intellectuals of the Diotima community: the aforementioned Luisa Muraro, as well as Ida Dominijanni, Diana Sartori, and Chiara Zamboni. The Diotima community and these authors in particular are largely unknown to the Anglophone reader, for very little has been made available in English of the theory and practice of the Italian thought of sexual difference.[18] The most notable exception is the recent publication in English of Muraro's seminal work *L'ordine simbolico della madre* [*The Symbolic Order of the Mother*], originally published in 1992, which we encourage the reader to use as a companion to our volume, and to which we will return in the final section of this introduction.[19] Our hope is that *Another Mother*—along with *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*—will contribute to reversing this neglect.

The Diotima community was founded in the early 1980s at the University of Verona, but its members had already had a long history of involvement with other feminist political organizations and feminist philosophical collectives in Milan, Rome, Padua, and Parma, from the 1960s onward. Diotima is not so much a school or a current of thought, but rather a space for cultural debates and political activism, where theory always merges with practice, and where the thought of sexual difference philosophically brings together contributions from various strains and experiences of Italian feminism. Much like the mother is the common name of sexual difference, Diotima is the common name of an open set of philosophical and political relations. As the community writes on its website: "We are not a group; we are particular, specific women bearing the signs—at once singular and common—of a history of relations, starting from the relation with our mother and continuing with the relation that binds us together and whose name is 'diotima'—the common name of the relation among women involved in philosophical research."[20]

The legacy of Luce Irigaray, as well as the radical thought of Carla Lonzi, are central for understanding the general perspective that informs Diotima's seminars and publications.[21] This is particularly true for Muraro, who became Irigaray's first translator into any language in the early 1970s, but in general it is also true for the other members of the community. From Irigaray's thought, the Diotima collective draws,

for instance, a genealogy of power based on the idea that the maternal represents the interdicted foundation of the social order—an interdiction that we described earlier as the dialectic of exploitation and foreclosure of the maternal. But the Diotima collective also reelaborates the basic tenets of what we may call Irigaray's epistemology, that is to say, the overarching theme of duality and metonymy as the deep structure that informs cognitive and emotional capacities and that is modeled after the feminine sex. For as she states, famously, woman's nonphallic economy is that "of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two but not divisible into one(s)."[22] To the extent that these traits occupy a central position in the thought of the Diotima community and constitute the core of a philosophy that is continuously rethematized, one could ask what critical novelty, what groundbreaking contribution these intellectuals bring to the table. For those who, having had an indirect exposure to the writings of Italian feminism, believe that the latter is simply a lesser branch of French feminism or a superfluous and not particularly innovative appendix of continental thought, we hope this volume will offer an opportunity to reconsider such a hurried verdict—and, in a sense, Anne Emmanuelle Berger's contribution to this volume addresses this question head on. Perhaps the first point to bear in mind is precisely that the passionate search for the theoretical new—today's surrogate for commercial innovation in the moribund state of corporate humanities—is not something that the feminist thought in question generally prizes. On the contrary, because of longstanding oppression, unearthing a distinctive feminist genealogy is a more essential goal for feminism. Within these genealogies, breaks, confutations, and other grand philosophical innovations are things that the thinkers under consideration in our volume gladly leave to the usual oedipal tradition of symbolic homicide. Such a tradition embodies what Muraro calls the "cannibal" tendency of intellectuals, "who believe they have invented what instead was simply transmitted to them."[23] The real question is instead to pause and reflect not on novelty itself but on the priority and centrality for today's debates of a series of radical insights elaborated by feminism, which bear testimony to a logical priority precisely because they go to the *root* of the problem, as the term *radical* signifies.

The thinkers we present in this volume, along with others who could not be included for reasons of space, retain a priority in contemporary

philosophy that is first of all historiographical. Diotima, along with other Italian feminist thinkers not associated with the community, such as Leopoldina Fortunati, Silvia Federici, Carla Lonzi, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, had begun in effect a philosophical investigation of the question of biopolitics long before anybody other than Michel Foucault—that is, Giorgio Agamben, Franco Berardi (aka Bifo), Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, among others—had begun elaborating this question further, as well as disseminating and popularizing it in Italy and elsewhere. Moreover, it seems to us that Diotima marks a clear discontinuity with and within that "Italian Theory," which, for better and for worse, is so in vogue in the Anglophone world, and that the primary discontinuity consists of the reelaboration of a psychoanalytic as well as feminist problematic to which most contemporary—and, not coincidentally, male—Italian thinkers are usually deaf.

What makes Italian feminism relevant for us today, among other things, is its deep understanding of the constitutive feminine elements of contemporary biopolitics—long before the concept was even named as such—and the comprehensive critical stance, more than the theoretical innovation, that Italian feminism elaborated over the course of four decades. In the terminology that Italian (male) philosophers used to popularize the concept, the biopolitical is broadly speaking a dimension in which the biological substratum of human life has become fully productive. It thus points to new possibilities of development of human potentiality as well as to the dangers of its manipulation and of its total submission into the circuits of production and exploitation. Yet, framed in this way, it is not difficult to notice how this ambivalence was something that women were accustomed to: it constituted indeed the very fabric of their existence since time immemorial. A mode of being in which the possibility of emancipation is always enmeshed with that of oppression is what defines the feminine experience precisely because women have been historically the agents that carried out the work of reproduction. Finally, this labor was characterized by a fundamental immaterial component that has now become hegemonic in cognitive capitalism. These productive practices recapitulate those same dynamics so that when discussing immaterial production the category "feminization of labor" is usually employed.[24]

The analysis and critique of the productive dimension of the work of reproduction, which until then was conceived of as something negligible because it was presumed not to create value, represents in fact the mainspring of Italian feminist thought. It was clearly articulated both in economic and theoretical terms by the first important Italian feminist group, Demau (Demystification of Patriarchal Authority), in its 1966 manifesto and, immediately after, it was given a more comprehensive philosophical organization by Carla Lonzi. In her seminal work "Let's Spit on Hegel," in particular, she isolated this point when she inquired why Marxism "overlooked that women play a part in the productive process through their work in reproducing labor-power with the family."[25] This deep awareness of a materialist analysis of feminine social conditions constitutes one of the compass points that orients Italian feminism in the critique of patriarchy, one that complements the more psychoanalytic approach that attacked the symbolic disciplining of the patriarchy. The feminist revolution against patriarchy was thus defined by an antimetaphysical effort that conjugated a critique of the patriarchal symbolic order and of the socioeconomic framework within which it operated. In short, this is a true materialism that embraced both the body and the mind of the women involved in the work of reproduction. And as such, the various currents that flowed into the sea of Italian feminism always stressed the need to produce political practices that would not only give voice to but also redefine feminine authority.

That this type of philosophical inquiry gives cause for reflection also for antiracist theory and practice will come as no surprise to the reader, for whom we assume it is no news that racism and patriarchy—along with patriarchy's attendant sexism and misogyny—are always intricately related. For example, Étienne Balibar is not alone in having noted the "amazing correspondence, almost interchangeability, of racism and sexism"—and, in effect, we were drawing attention to such correspondence and mutual imbrications when implying, earlier in this introduction, that it was not a coincidence if the women who refused sex with and were burned alive by ISIS soldiers in Mosul were members of an ethnic and religious minority and if the victims of the Pulse mass shooting were largely Latinas and Latinos.[26] It is true that the essays included in this volume and, in general, the feminist theory elaborated by Diotima

do not specifically engage with the question of race (and there are historical reasons for this, including the ways in which the question of race, on the one hand, has marked indelibly each and every phase of the development of the Italian nation-state from its foundation in 1860 to the present day, and, on the other hand, has emerged as a crucial and highly contested cultural, social, and political issue in Italy only relatively recently). And yet, despite such undertheorization of race and racism, the theory and practice of sexual difference elaborated by the Diotima collective has much to offer to antiracist projects: this is the case not only because, generally speaking, it is hard to imagine a critique of racism without a critique of patriarchy (as the pioneering and still highly relevant work of black feminist thinkers such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, and others has shown); this is the case also because, in particular, Diotima's discovery and elaboration of the maternal symbolic constitutes an essential element in the critique of any system of domination, oppression, and exploitation to the extent to which such systems necessarily attempt, with varying degrees of success, to lay claim to the ownership of human reproduction. Obviously, the question of how the monopoly on the reproduction of human beings constitutes a crucial nexus between patriarchy and modern systems of domination, oppression, and exploitation—including, in particular, that foundational and paradigmatic form of biopolitical governmentality which is racial slavery—is a highly complex question, and a full investigation is beyond the scope of this introduction. Suffice it to say here that many a scholar who has grappled with the role played by patriarchal relations of domination and especially by the patriarchal control over human reproduction in the functioning of racial slavery has bumped up against the foreclosure of the symbolic order of the mother (without necessarily elaborating it or naming it as such). One thinks here of the path-breaking work of Colette Guillaumin, who already in the 1970s argued that the mutual imbrications of race and sex as well as the centrality of the control over human reproduction in racial slavery found their shared condition of possibility in the modern invention "of Nature, of our Mother Nature," of "the social idea of natural group," that is, in the modern invention of the naturalness of social relations of domination.[27] One thinks also of Hortense Spillers, who in the 1980s, when exposing the myth of the matriarchal structure of the "Negro Family" under enslavement as a racist and misogynist cultural fantasy, famously

reaches the conclusion that, on the contrary, "the African-American woman, the mother, the daughter, becomes historically the powerful and shadowy evocation of a cultural synthesis long evaporated—the law of the Mother."[28] Although Spillers here is bearing witness to and grappling with not merely the foreclosure but the absolute destruction—or, as she puts it poignantly at one point, the "pulverization and murder"—of the maternal symbolic, her urgent exhortations to regain "the heritage of the *mother*" and to reclaim "the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name')" as a form of "female empowerment"[29] strongly resonate with Diotima's emphasis on feminist practices aimed at establishing and fostering intense symbolic bonds (e.g., new languages, new political imaginaries, new ways of naming, new forms of community) between women (mothers, daughters, and sisters) and at elaborating a notion of feminine authority, rather than power, as a way to "articulate one's life according to the project of freedom."[30]

THE POLITICAL PRAXIS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND ITS SYMBOLIC ORDER

The radical and rigorous critique of both patriarchy and capitalism in all of its facets emphasized the necessity to produce a specific space of autonomy that would liberate women. And even if there were differences in the various currents of Italian feminism, it is fair to say that they all found their common horizon of meaning in a political praxis that would produce such a space of autonomy. Therein one finds one of the most significant differences between Diotima's project and Irigaray's lesson. What in Irigaray remains a theoretical possibility—for example, see her discussion of a feminine "divine potency" that transcends masculine definitions in *Speculum of the Other Woman*—for Italian feminism, and most certainly for Diotima, is from the start a concrete practice, the practice of sexual difference.[31] In time, this structural element would eventually mark a divergence from Irigaray, who has recently turned, for instance, to supporting gender equality and inclusionary policies typical of the co-optive State, which the Italian thought of sexual difference would never accept. The lesson of Lonzi still holds true: "Woman's difference is her millennial absence from history. Let us profit from this difference; for once we have achieved inclusion in society, who is to say how many more centuries will have to pass before we can throw off this

new yoke?"[32] This is why Diotima continues to articulate a theory and a practice of sexed thought opposing any attempt to erase sexual asymmetry between man and woman.[33]

Due to their particular positioning in society, Italian feminists developed very early on an acute awareness of the link between the corporeal dimension of experience and its symbolic translation in term of social norms. Their struggle again was more distinctively biopolitical than that of their male counterparts, for they had to carry out a critique not only of capital relations of production but also of sexuality and the symbolic domain that regulated the social complex. Sexuality and the specific type of subjectivity that it generated was the obscure matter that defined, oppressed, but also disclosed the germs of liberation for a generation of women who were rapidly transitioned in the modern Italy of the postwar era. After all, the feminist slogan of 1968 "the personal is political" forces those who take it seriously to embrace life itself as a basis for action and thought. From its inception, Diotima decided to investigate the relationship between the mother and the daughter, basing its work on the notion of sexual difference as a *productive* structural asymmetry. The latter radically defies the centered, sovereign identity of the patriarchal order, where the male was the standard of measure and women its dependent variations. In this sense, and without fear of raising the objection of a precritical essentialism, we can speak of an ontological difference that cuts across subjectivity, specifically because the position occupied by woman under patriarchy is that of difference itself—the excluded, the subject whose identity is negated because it represents a property owned by man. It is that type of subjectivity that comes to the foreground when, as Dominijanni tells us, we speak of "an embodied and sexed singularity, born of tensions between reasons and drives, marked from and depending on relationships to others, first and foremost on the relationship to the mother as the matrix of life."[34] In the discovery of a radical autonomy for women, Diotima focused its attention on the symbolic placement deriving from the expression of the potentialities of the maternal order.

This is why this entire volume is organized as a debate, investigation, and further elaboration of one of Muraro's fundamental hypotheses, namely, the essential role played in the constitution of sexual difference by a process of symbolization that she refers to as the aforementioned

"symbolic order of the mother"—a hypothesis that is related yet significantly different from the ones that other thinkers have put forth regarding the relation between sexual difference and symbolization, that is, Lacan, Kristeva, and Irigaray, all thinkers with whom Diotima has been in direct or indirect dialogue over the years. It is not our intention to impose our interpretation of Muraro's *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* on the reader. One of the deeper meanings of this work, after all, lies in the kind of response that it activates in those who encounter it. Here we will simply sketch the main features of this framework and leave the task of fuller interpretations and further elaborations to the attentive reader. We may begin from the idea that the symbolic force enabled by the maternal transcends that of the father, as it comes logically before but also goes beyond it. The symbolic order of the mother is not the specular counterpart of the masculine; it is not the oasis of respectability that eventually our society granted to women.

To use a Foucauldian terminology, the maternal manifested another order of positivity buried under the patriarchal censure. However, this order should not be conceived of as completely determined or as ideally perfected. On the contrary, the maternal is constantly being redefined and reworked through the social transformations occurring in society. Organized around a metonymic principle of signification, it displaces and undermines the verticality and uniformity of possession of the patriarchal order. While certainly involving the question of origin, the maternal is nonetheless a more general symbolic framework that patriarchy unfailingly obscures, devalorizes, or expropriates. After all, origin, if only for the drive to constant change that defines our mortality, is that shadow that does not abandon us once we are born, for it insists on our processes of growth till death. The maternal is what returns, but not as a mystical fusion, nor as the idealization of a complete positivity. In other words, we should not confuse the maternal with the role that the mother has taken up in patriarchal society nor, we may add, with the shiny image of the independent and free consumer woman projected by the post-oedipal order.

The maternal symbolic also occupies a unique position in post-1968 feminist debates, especially with regards to the deadlock reached by official feminism when rightfully denouncing the oppression of male society. As early feminist circles well understood, these representations

of women's oppression tended to mirror the very logic that made that woman a victim so that, "caught in a vicious circle, the subject's political demand for recognition and reparation repeats, in the form of compulsion, the very experience of injury that subjugates (but also constitutes) the same subject."[35] The discovery of a space for an independent and logically prior maternal symbolic matrix represents instead the possibility for the political practice of freedom. This symbolic order offers a space of recognition and, most importantly, of authority that was previously foreclosed. The figure of the mother enables and thus also supports desire, for historically there has always been a "real difficulty which a woman encounters in acknowledging the immensity of a desire she has no way of putting forward, openly, in full sight of society, without the disguise of some female virtue."[36] In this sense, the idea of loving the mother innervating the political and theoretical practice of Diotima's feminism has far-reaching consequences. Within this type of mother–daughter continuum, for instance, standard conceptualizations of gratitude and indebtedness are turned around. From constraint and servitude, debt as social obligation mutates into the expression and the practice of freedom. This remark may seem paradoxical unless we are able to think ourselves as subjects in radically nonproprietary terms. The symbolic order of the mother constitutes an enabling structure that reminds us both of the lack of foundation for the subject and, thus, precisely because of the existence of this order, of its possibility to express its freedom. Here is how Muraro explains the difference between the symbolic order (as an enabling structure) and its common trivialization (the metaphoric qua the abstract):

> Many people confuse the symbolic and the metaphoric. In order to go over the difference rapidly, let us think about what bread means to the hungry or drugs mean to addicts. For them either bread or drugs are associated with everything and therefore acquire an enormous significance. This is not a metaphorical meaning, however, which prevails instead in the language of others, the well fed and the non-addicted.[37]

As a matrix the symbolic has an immanent force that is both material and logical. It is in this sense that it is a symbolic space; it carries with it the strength of a language that is world-forming. This is why for Muraro

it is necessary to establish "a relationship that shows gratitude toward the woman who brought us into the world."[38] However, this debt is not associated with guilt and the need for material restitution. In reality, nothing is given back because what we own is not something we can appropriate and return. So what does learning to love the mother mean? The experience of this relationship—due to the fact that it is originary both in temporal and in logical terms—provides a schemata for our being; put differently, it defines the contours of our form of life, to use Wittgenstein's terminology. Conversely, "the advent of the law of the father (of patriarchy), which is superimposed on the positivity of the labor of the mother, severs logic from being and is a cause of our losing the sense of being over and over again."[39] This is the logical damage that the interdiction of the maternal propagates.

Muraro, in fact, reads the history of Western philosophy as the uninterrupted effect of the application of this law. She cites, for instance, two consequences. The first is duplication, that is to say, the doubling of being that occupied the work of generations of philosophers: being and nonbeing, the idea and its copy, the mind and the body, and so forth. The other is nihilism in its many forms, which again prescribes a certain severance and separation with being. All this may seem a reiteration of a belated essentialist philosophy. Yet, consider the case Muraro makes with regard to infancy and the symbolic competence we acquire then. Muraro argues that "children are capable of transforming a state of need into a veritable laboratory for the transformation knowledge of themselves and the world."[40] When confronted with the negative, children demonstrate an incredibly generative capacity to produce meaning, to play with reality, which adults usually take for naiveté at best. Growing up, in fact, means *growing out* of that fanciful pliability and finally confronting the gravity and *reality* of existence. But doesn't the paralyzing understanding of negativity sever the possibilities of being as well? Doesn't it freeze becoming, thus producing nihilism? Obviously, the theorization of a return to the playful, imaginative world that is typical of infancy is not a ruse to better dominate and thus manipulate existence. The early symbolic competence we develop as children is anything but a subject's absolute prerogative over reality. It is rather relationality and, we may argue, joyful reliance. The logical force of this operation involves both language and affect, interlocking them into a

living dimension. This idea makes of Muraro's philosophy a contemporary form of monism.

The reader may appreciate here the significance of the term *symbolic* for Muraro, and thus also that of the expression "learning to love the mother." The roots of this philosophical conceptualization may be found in what feminists in Italy developed and practiced for many years with the notion of *affidamento* [entrustment], that is to say, the practice of relying on another feminine figure in order to support the expression of one's desire. As the Milan's Women Bookstore Collective argued: "authority is received originally from another human being who is in the position to give it, who has the authority to give it. But she cannot have it if the person who needs to receive it does not acknowledge it in her."[41] It is important to note the hermeneutical nature of the symbolic debt that mutually reinforces the two figures involved by providing recognition and thus a quantum of symbolic force for expression. In lieu of an economic transaction imbued with moral implications, what we have instead is the theorization and practice of an alternative form of social relationship. What a striking difference from the long shadow of guilt cast by the father, whose request in terms of reverence and duty is proverbial, and whose cult demands ceaseless expiation. And, conversely, what an empowering experience for women philosophers, and philosophers in general, whose thought is usually invalidated unless it pays dues to the tutelary deity of their forefathers.

From the start, for Diotima the practice of entrustment took a particular direction that, by *cutting across* the field of traditional theories, became a path for the production of philosophical work. As the founders of the community recall, two rules organized their discussion and theoretical practice:

> We envisioned the first six months as experimentation. In that phase, we believed it was best to produce the texts for discussion without using commentaries by other authors and without referencing philosophical positions that had been already defined; rather, we resorted to the knowledge produced by the women's political movement. In addition to the rule of not referencing external authorities, we also had another negative rule: not offering definitions of the terms we employed. Either those terms generated meaning through the discussion or they didn't at all. This meant that

> that which was already said somewhere else was not to anchor us down, exception made for that which was able to re-present itself in a meaningful way and at a specific time.[42]

These authorizing mechanisms show a trust in the signifying capacities of discourse and of relationships that are reminiscent of creative manifestos. But the objective of sexual difference is not artistic novelty. Its work implies a symbolic cut that is assumed as it simultaneously constitutes a daily political practice, that is to say, a differentiating mechanism that engenders transformation in reality because it does not seek to seize the latter and turn it into some proprietary knowledge, and this is true also for the discovery of a particular feminine substance. Sexual difference is deeply rooted in specific singularities and their present relationalities. This practice "proceeds with the elaboration of difference itself by the same investigating subject" so that "difference from being a thought-object turns into thinking thought."[43] "Thinking thought" here means an immanent practice that does not produce a *thing* that can be defined and appropriated but rather a movement that disrupts the phallic paradigm of the Western rational subject based on sameness and on the progressive domination of reality.

Diotima's sustained effort in theorizing and practicing sexual difference is of significant impact when it comes to the analysis of postmodern, or neoliberal, society. It is also a good starting point for us to grapple with the particular time of our writing, as we mentioned earlier, a summer drenched in blood, with mounting waves of racism and sexism that, unfortunately, are likely to intensify in the near future. We are referring here to the rise of the current post-oedipal order that has come to regulate political practices and social norms in our society. From a political, economic, and socio-symbolic point of view, neoliberal governmentality moves from an exercise of power based on verticality to one that is horizontal. Openly biological racism, for instance, has been replaced by *cultural differentialism*, which "purports that each culture is different and noncommensurable," thereby constructing an ideology that is "not based on the verticality of the biological, but precisely on the postmodern horizontality of geographical and religious differences."[44] No less brutal than previous biological racism, the racism of cultural differentialism is deeply entrenched in the new modes of extraction of value. And

insofar as domination and exploitation are the hidden core of racializing mechanisms, one should look at the unregulated and excessive environment of late capitalism to understand the reasons for the ferocity of today's wounded masculinities. As Paolo Virno writes, while post-Fordism engages in the production of collective knowledge it also "gives it a hierarchical, racist, despotic expression." He continues:

> It makes of socialization outside work a feral and deregulated sphere predisposed to the exercise of personal domination; it installs the myth of ethnic determination, of rediscovered roots, of "blood and soil" supermarket rhetoric; it reestablishes in its folds familial links between sects and clans destined to achieve that disciplining of bodies which is no longer provided by work relations.[45]

Neoliberal governmentality is based on privatization and exploitation of the common wealth in all its manifestations—that is, natural resources, social practices, rights and services of the public sphere, and so forth—and a tendency toward immaterial production and valorization that obscures its material base. Our post-oedipal society—no less patriarchal for being post-oedipal—is informed by a similar totalitarian logic. In the sexual domain, the disorder created by the predicament of the law of the father now incites transgression and enjoyment as principles that organize and direct the social field. Obviously, we have no nostalgia for the decline of an order that meant oppression and exploitation. But differently from certain current Lacanian approaches, Italian feminism makes clear that if this order has declined it is precisely because of the struggles feminism carried out. At the same time, Italian feminists also note that this struggle did not produce a total emancipation. Far from liberating, this new disorder has multiple consequences at the level of power. As previously argued, power has lost its vertical, hierarchical structure and is now disseminated in the fabric of society, not as a multiplier of freedom but rather as a micromechanism of noncoercive disciplining of the social body. While neoliberalism represents an unprecedented attempt at the valorization of the whole of reality, one that feeds on excess and on the breaking of boundaries, and thus also operates according to a logic that needs crises and emergencies in order to increase productivity, it is not surprising that acts of violence proliferate. As

Diana Sartori argues, "With the end of patriarchy also comes the end of its order; the result, however, is not the immediate establishment of a new order, but rather an increase in disorder, and the return of forms of . . . action and emotion that are more archaic, increasingly often elementary and violent" (chapter 6 in this volume). To better understand the global civil war that is looming on the horizon, one should combine geopolitical analysis with a closer look at how the politics of life in neoliberalism and the politics of the symbolic in the post-oedipal order mutually reinforce each other.

The emphasis that Diotima puts on the historical dimension of the symbolic is thus a necessary resource for those who do not surrender to the horizontal disciplining of contemporary power. In Muraro we find a first attempt to dissect the molecular mechanism of power: she locates such a mechanism in what she calls the regime of hypermetaphoricity, which tends to homogenize the gendered division of labor within contemporary symbolic production, while the metonymic is for her the radical structure that cuts through a phallic uniformity and announces a new women's order. In Dominijanni, Sartori, and Zamboni, on the other hand, we find a further problematizing of the maternal in connection with the criticalities brought to the fore by our highly technologized "corpo sociale selvaggio" [wild social body]—that is to say, the post-oedipal body as it is controlled and mobilized through circuits of libidinal injunctions (chapter 1 in this volume). The primary dimension of desire that vitalist currents in contemporary theory sometimes depict as an oasis of potential freedom is in fact critiqued from the point of view of the transformations produced by post-oedipal society. Hence Diotima's interest in preserving a space for the negative as an inexhaustible gap that returns and that defies any effort to make of the mother a positive and self-centered entity or worse, that is, "an idealizing exaltation of the maternal as a palingenesis of politics" (chapter 6 in this volume). It is in the irreducibility of the maternal as an origin that always returns that we may find an opening to the deadlocks of contemporary society. Hence the idea of an-other mother, as a differentiator that is always *other* and that always repeats itself while transforming itself and while questioning her continuous return.

This volume follows a similar progression: from the impact of sexual difference and of the maternal on the understanding of language, to the

notions of the maternal symbolic, maternal authority, and maternal negativity, and to the reappraisal of these notions in the wake of current theoretical debates and current transformations in the social and political domains.

In Part I, "Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Politics of Sexual Difference," we begin with "The Contact Word," by Ida Dominijanni. This essay was published as a preface to the 1998 edition of Muraro's book *To Knit or to Crochet? A Political-Linguistic Tale on the Enmity between Metaphor and Metonymy* (originally published in 1981); here, Dominijanni probes and elaborates further in a more explicitly Marxist vein Muraro's fundamental tenets of the maternal symbolic, particularly the importance of metonymic symbolization as a political tool against the identitarian politics based on quotas for women that institutional feminism has promoted in the last few decades. We then move to Muraro's "To Knit or to Crochet." This is an excerpt from the aforementioned book—that is, its first two chapters, which articulate the difference between the hypermetaphoricity regime and the metonymic one by engaging with a wide variety of thinkers, including Agamben, Freud, Irigaray, Lacan, Wittgenstein, as well as Lorenzo Accame, Paul Feyerabend, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Jean Wahl, and, above all, with Roman Jakobson. And we close this part of the volume with Muraro's essay "On the Relation between Words and Things as Frequentation," which revisits the main themes of *To Knit or to Crochet* more than thirty years after the publication of that book by touching briefly on Virginia Woolf's work (*A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*) and by offering further clarifications of the immanent relation between language and reality in its different forms: the masculine metalanguage that transcends the world, the metonymic system of significations that instead takes part in the world, and finally the latter's process of resignification through an open series of encounters between speakers.

In Part II, "The Maternal Symbolic and Its Language," we introduce the Anglophone reader to another key member of the collective: Chiara Zamboni. Her "Maternal Language between Limit and Infinite Opening" begins this part of the volume: this is a much revised and expanded version of an essay originally published in 1998 in Diotima's *All'inizio di tutto: La lingua materna* [At the beginning of everything: The maternal language]. This version of the essay capsizes the logocentric

approach to language as a system of rules (and as a totality built on delimitations) by exploring its existential opening as a living but finite system, with its gaps and voids. Zamboni offers a thorough reexamination of the symbolic dimension of the maternal by focusing on the question of language while drawing on the works of Kristeva and of Françoise Dolto. We then continue with an essay by Muraro, "Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Dead Mother Complex," which was originally published as the appendix to the 2006 edition of *L'ordine simbolico della madre* and which was not included in the English translation of this book. In this essay, Muraro reflects back on *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* by engaging briefly with André Green and Slavoj Žižek, and by arguing that the male symbolic standpoint always tends to conceive of the issue of freedom reductively as a necessary separation from the maternal.

Part III, "The Mother and the Negative," consists of two chapters of another book by Diotima, *L'ombra della madre* [The shadow of the mother] (2007), which is entirely centered on the maternal as figure of the negative. The first is Diana Sartori's essay, "With the Maternal Spirit," in which, besides engaging with many different feminist thinkers in the Anglo-American, French, and Italian traditions, Sartori offers a detailed analysis of and makes a distinction between what is productive in the maternal symbolic and the dark shadows that the masculine symbolic still casts on it. And the second is Ida Dominijanni's "The Undecidable Imprint." Here, Dominijanni offers a retrospective assessment of the political militancy of the Libreria delle donne in Milan, and develops a critique—friendly, though no less a critique—of Muraro's work, and, in particular, of Muraro's blindness to the question of the paternal and to the question of sexuality within the maternal symbolic.

We then move to Part IV, "Thinking with Diotima," in which we explore how Muraro's ideas resonate in contemporary debates both within and outside Diotima. Anne Emmanuelle Berger's essay, "And Yet She Speaks! 'Italian Feminism' and Language," contextualizes Muraro's work in the wake of the linguistic turn of the 1970s as well as illustrates the connections between Muraro's thought and more recent poststructuralist developments, particularly the critique of the androcentric view of the subject. Berger also recapitulates and reassesses some of the most important critiques of the thought of sexual difference offered by other feminist thinkers. In "Origin and Dismeasure: The Thought of Sexual

Difference in Luisa Muraro and Ida Dominijanni, and the Rise of Post-Fordist Psychopathology," Andrea Righi tests the efficacy of Muraro's feminism by addressing the problem of excess as it is posed by the injunction to enjoy typical of neoliberal society. In so doing, he also studies and provides a critical approach to another central element in Muraro's notion of the maternal symbolic, that of fixation. Finally, the afterword to the book, "Mother Degree Zero; or, Of Beginnings: An Afterword on Luisa Muraro's Feminist Inaptitude for Philosophy," by Cesare Casarino, completes our trajectory by returning to the beginning. As he details the intricacies of the problem of origin articulated in the first chapter of *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*, Casarino wants us to think not against or beyond but *together* with Muraro. The goal is to understand what is at stake when we discuss the question of beginning in philosophy, and to what an extent the dominant and patriarchal understanding of beginning obscures the ways in which, according to the maternal symbolic, origin is, in fact, always present in the plane of immanence. If we invoke here a Deleuzian terminology, a language that is key to our contemporary philosophical debates on ontology, that is because Muraro's particular perspective on the question of beginnings reveals unexpected and surprising connections between these two philosophers. But Muraro's perspective—unlike Gilles Deleuze's—is born out of an explicit acknowledgment and affirmation of the love of the mother: This *other* perspective is the true *differentia specifica* of Muraro's work and, indeed, of the Diotima collective. It is the result of an unrelenting and communal philosophical elaboration and political praxis of women's struggles. It is because of these struggles that we believe the following pages have so much to contribute to philosophy and politics today.

NOTES

1. We do note, however, a recent resurgence of interest in the question of the mother in Anglophone feminist philosophy: see, among others, Lisa Guenther's *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Amber Jacobs's *On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis, and the Law of the Mother* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); and Alison Stone's *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). One of the aims of our volume is to foster a dialogue between, on the one hand, these current and

ongoing debates in the Anglophone world and, on the other hand, Italian feminist philosophical scholarship on the question of the mother.

2. Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2006), 46. Please note that since the English version of this work had not been published yet at the time when our book manuscript was being finalized, all quotations from this work are translated (a) by Mark William Epstein with Cesare Casarino in this introduction, (b) by Anne Emmanuelle Berger (from the French version of Muraro's work) in her contribution to this volume, and (c) by Cesare Casarino in his contribution to this volume. See also note 19 below.

3. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 46.

4. Heidegger's famous declaration opens *Being and Time*. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1, but see also xviixix and 1–3.

5. Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19.

6. On this matter, see also A. Kiarina Kordela, *Epistemontology in Spinoza-Marx-Freud-Lacan: The (Bio)Power of Structure* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

7. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 23.

8. For the question of "given reality" in Muraro's work, see "Mother Degree Zero; or, Of Beginnings" in this volume.

9. http://www.npr.org/2016/06/16/482322488/orlando-shooting-what-happened-update.

10. http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/orlando-nightclub-massacre/terror-hate-what-motivated-orlando-nightclub-shooter-n590496.

11. "The FBI is appropriately investigating this as an act of terrorism." These were the words used by the (generally thoughtful) U.S. President Barack Obama at a White House press conference a few hours after the event. https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/06/12/president-obama-tragic-shooting-orlando. Despite the fact that investigations seem to have excluded the possibility of Mateen's involvement with so-called terrorist groups of any sort and that his devotion to any type of Islam has been proven to be very tenuous at best, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump unsurprisingly called Mateen an "Islamic terrorist" in his nomination acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, on June 21, 2016.

12. http://aranews.net/2016/06/isis-extremists-burn-death/.

13. Many years after his 1949 pronouncement regarding poetry and Auschwitz in his "Cultural Criticism and Society," however, Theodor Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics*, modified his view in a passage that is highly relevant to the matters at hand: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who

escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier." Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 362–63.

14. Jacqueline Rose, "Feminism and the Abomination of Violence," *Cultural Critique* 94 (Fall 2016): 6. In this essay, Rose cites the alarming statistics on rising violence against women. On this question, see also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's recent essay "Crimes of Identity," in *Juliet Mitchell and the Lateral Axis: Twenty-First-Century Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, ed. Robbie Duschinsky and Susan Walker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 207–27.

15. Rose, "Feminism and the Abomination of Violence," 6.

16. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 177–78.

17. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 199.

18. There are a few exceptions: *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference*, ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002); and *Sexual Difference*, ed. Patrizia Cicogna and Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). While Dominijanni's work has been translated into English, and while Muraro's work has been widely translated into French, Spanish, and German, they do not feature prominently in the above-mentioned texts. Sartori's and Zamboni's works have never appeared in English.

19. Luisa Muraro, *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018).

20. Quoted in Vittorio Possenti, *Il nuovo principio persona* (Rome: Armando Editore, 2013), 66. Diotima's website may be found at this link: http://www.diotimafilosofe.it/.

21. Since its foundation, Diotima has published approximately ten books (i.e., Diotima appears on the cover as the name of the collective author of each volume; each of the volumes includes a series of single-authored essays by some of the community's members; and the essays are all on the same topic and in dialogue with each other. Many of the members of the community also publish their own books and pursue other projects).

22. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 24.

23. Ida Dominijanni, "La madre dopo il matriarcato," interview with Luisa Muraro, *Il manifesto*, October 28, 2005.

24. See Cristina Morini, "The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism," *Feminist Review* 87 (2007): 40–59.

25. Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 43.

26. Étienne Balibar, "Racism Revisited: Sources, Relevance, and Aporias of a Modern Concept," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1638.

27. Colette Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2003), 136, 137.

28. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 80. When writing of the need to regain "the heritage of the mother," Spillers is referring specifically to "the African-American male"; however, this is argued within a general context of "female empowerment." For a reelaboration of Spillers's arguments in and for the present, see Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014). We mention Weheliye's work also because, similarly to what we are arguing regarding the Diotima community, it shows how black feminist scholars such as Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, in effect, had been elaborating a theory of biopolitics (without naming it as such) well before Agamben and others gave it currency from the mid-1990s onward.

29. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80.

30. De Lauretis, ed., *Sexual Difference*, 31. It should be noted that over the years Diotima has done much work to produce a concept of feminine authority that would be distinct from and altogether other than power intended as sovereign power, given the inevitably patriarchal connotations of the latter. See, for example, Diotima's *Oltre l'uguaglianza: Le radici femminili dell'autorità* (Naples: Liguori, 1995) as well as Muraro's recent book *Autorità* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2013).

31. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 319.

32. Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 41.

33. See the point Muraro makes in "Feminine Genealogy," in *Engaging with Irigaray*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 317–33.

34. Ida Dominijanni, "Venus's Strabismus: Looking at the Crisis of Politics from the Politics of Difference," *Iris* 2 (2010): 176.

35. Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 100.

36. De Lauretis, ed., *Sexual Difference*, 115.

37. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 3.

38. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 3.

39. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 27.

40. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 127.

41. De Lauretis, ed., *Sexual Difference*, 115.

42. Chiara Zamboni and Luisa Muraro, "Cronaca dei fatti principali di Diotima," in Diotima, *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milano: La Tartaruga, 1987), 177, 179.

43. Cristiana Fischer et al., "La differenza sessuale: da scoprire e da produrre," in Diotima, *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, 32, 34.

44. Andrea Righi, *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 161.

45. Paolo Virno, "Theses on the New European Fascism," *Grey Room* 21 (2005): 24.