

Inclining Politics. Introducing Adriana Cavarero

**Federica Castelli, Marco Piasentier, and
Sara Raimondi**

The philosopher Adriana Cavarero has long been a well recognised voice in the plural landscape of contemporary Italian thought. Her engagement with grounding themes and ideas has resonated across, and often profoundly shaken, multiple fields of enquiry, spanning political philosophy, the humanities and classical studies, literary theory, and the traditions of feminist debates. Whilst a coherent synthesis of such a vast reception would be impossible to pursue in one volume, the collection of contributions that follows attempts to portray – via a multiplicity of perspectives and angles – Cavarero’s work, and the important legacy and debates that it continues to spark, not only in Italy, but also, increasingly, at an international level. On the backdrop of an expanding reception in and outside Italy, however, we can ponder whether it is plausible to speak of an “Italian” philosophy; in other words, can philosophy be constructed in national or geographical terms, or rather does it need to be conceived as inevitably stateless, and not bound by territorial constraints? Assuming the admissibility of the existence of a philosophy that is distinctively “Italian”, then, the question would arise: what are its main traits? What are its distinctive and, possibly, uniquely recognisable characteristics? While these questions have been central to the *Journal of Italian Philosophy* since its inception, their origins have a much more complex and extensive historical trajectory.

Studies on the topic can be traced back to the writings of Bertrando Spaventa in the 19th century (Spaventa, 2009), and some of their most comprehensive and innovative

formulations in the 20th century can be found in the works of Giovanni Gentile (2003) and Eugenio Garin (2008). While these historical works have not generated significant interest in the Anglophone world, contemporary Italian philosophy has, in recent years, begun to gain attention in the international philosophical landscape. This growing international interest has developed alongside a burgeoning national debate regarding the relevance of Italian philosophy and its positioning within the European context, particularly thanks to the contributions of Roberto Esposito (2012). The use of terms like “Italian thought” and “Italian theory” – to characterise the prevailing trends in contemporary Italian philosophy – evokes a reminiscent debate akin to the one sparked in the US regarding the significance of French post-structuralism from the 1960s onward. This correlation is not merely terminological; it extends to the substantial borrowing of concepts from French post-structuralism by current Italian philosophy. A prominent instance of this influence lies in Michel Foucault’s legacy in the genealogies of biopolitics, as this line of inquiry has notably become a reference point in the works of influential figures such as Giorgio Agamben, Toni Negri, and Esposito himself.

However, acknowledging this intellectual kinship should not lead to overemphasise the analogy between French and Italian theory. Each of these philosophical trajectories maintains its own distinctiveness, and brings a unique contribution within the broader landscape of contemporary European thought, even if with some recognisable resonances and borrowing. Moreover, the terms “French theory” and “Italian theory” have quite different genealogies. The former mainly originates in the Anglophone world, whereas “Italian theory”, as Dario Gentili and Elettra Stimilli argue in a recent volume on the subject, “is not an American invention but a way to reflect – within Italy – on the potentialities and the limits of the diffusion of some strands of Italian philosophy, strands that recently re-emerged and came to the forefront of the

international debate at a time of crisis for those European philosophies – like, for instance, deconstruction, hermeneutics, critical theory, and post-structuralism – that were more renowned up to a few decades ago” (Gentili and Stimilli, 2018: 9). Dedicating an issue of the *Journal of Italian Philosophy* to the works of Adriana Cavarero allows us both to reflect on the potentials and limitations of Italian theory, and to open it up to its reception in the international debate. On the one hand, Cavarero’s thinking sets her apart from the Anglophone tradition of gender studies; on the other hand, it places her in critical dialogue with certain expressions of European feminism. Although her thinking is influenced by all of the above traditions, and she continuously engages with them, it also bears a distinctive vibrancy of thought, and an inexhaustible need to intertwine different perspectives, which we try to capture in the volume.

Cavarero’s texts are permeated with the themes of bodily materiality, political practices, and with a deep critique of the patriarchal symbolic order. These critical stances resonate with the struggles that some Italian feminist groups have upheld over the years (such as Rivolta Femminile, Diotima, and others). In line with their radicality and complexity, Cavarero’s political proposal is not limited to claims for recognition and rights at the individual level; rather, it operates at the level of interdependent relations between embodied subjectivities, and thus implies the plural and collective dimension of action. In this posture, politics continually overflows the spaces of institutions, representation, and law, and becomes the vibrant matter of living together. For the Italian feminist tradition, power and politics are not the same (Diotima, 2009); power is what needs to be questioned, understood, but also eluded. Politics means being on another side, thinking politics by beginning from bodies and relationships before rights. Mirroring her political stance, on the ethical plane, Cavarero challenges the sovereign subject and the idea of freedom as a

property. In her dialogue with authors from different traditions, she builds bridges, alliances, interlocutions; she re-reads, re-signifies, and eventually subverts the accepted intellectual heritage of canonical thinkers in the tradition of male philosophy – a practice shared with other Italian feminist authors: if Carla Lonzi invited us to spit on Hegel, Adriana Cavarero urged us to think “*in spite of Plato*”. The universal, neutral subject of the Western metaphysical tradition is revealed in its partial nature; for Cavarero, knowledge is understood as embodied, gendered, and linked to practices and contexts. We are embodied, interdependent, sexualised subjectivities. Difference and differences are rooted in the materiality of our bodies, which make – and are not just made by – politics.

Bodies, therefore, in the complexity and plurality of the paths they take, are not just to be deconstructed, erased, and deprived of any particularity; rather, they are a point of rooting, an element with which to come to terms and, sometimes, enter into conflict. In this inextricable knot between bodies, relations, and subjectivities, it is especially the body of the mother that becomes the metaphor and the emblem of a social and political order grounded on interdependence, care, and disparity between powers and subjects – an order that thus stands as an alternative to the ontopolitics of phallogocentrism. In Cavarero, the maternal figure so conceived redefines politics as relationship and bodily practices; it opens up rootedness and care. In line with the philosophical tradition of Italian feminism and in resonance with the work of contemporary philosophers such as Judith Butler, Cavarero generates a feminist knowledge that does not amount to a discourse *on* women as a static object of study. Rather feminist knowledge is an opportunity to critique the Western subject and its metaphysics. To the Western sovereign subject, feminist knowledge opposes a relational, embodied, situated ontology. This leads Cavarero and Butler – in different yet intertwined ways – to think of new

horizons for ethics and politics that foreground precariousness and vulnerability, care and violence.

Picking up the feminist invitation to situate knowledge, we can explore the intertwining of the personal and the political in Cavarero's journey. Born in Bra (Piedmont) in 1947, she attended a *liceo classico* in Turin, and pursued her studies in Philosophy at the University of Padua; the latter town saw the start of her academic career before she moved to Verona, where she served as a Professor of Political Philosophy until 2016. Her earlier works were centred on various aspects of ancient and modern philosophical traditions, encompassing four major monographs: *Political Dialectic in Plato* (1974), *Plato: The Philosopher and the Political Problem* (1976), *The Political Theory of John Locke* (1984), and *The Hegelian Interpretation of Parmenides* (1984). During these years, Cavarero significantly contributed to the establishment of the feminist and philosophical community in Verona known as "Diotima" (1984), named after Diotima of Mantinea, whom Socrates referred to as his fundamental teacher in the pages of Plato's *Symposium*. Her involvement in Diotima continued until 1990.

Starting from the late 80s, Cavarero embarked on a radical intellectual journey, increasingly focused on critically examining the notions of subjectivity and the corporeal self in the Western metaphysical tradition. Her seminal work, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (1995) undertakes a rigorous deconstruction of classical philosophical texts, primarily sourced from Plato, along with insights from Homer and Parmenides. The main aim is to liberate four prominent Greek female figures from the confines of patriarchal discourse that has historically constrained them within predefined societal roles. While disentangling these female figures from the grip of entrenched patriarchal narratives, Cavarero concurrently constructs an alternative symbolic framework. If death functions as the foundational concept for the entire structure of traditional philosophy,

Cavarero posits birth as the conceptual linchpin, which enables the interweaving of new feminist critical concepts.

As Guaraldo (2022) highlights in a concise yet significant analysis of Cavarero's *oeuvre*, her philosophical-political endeavour draws inspiration from corporeal materiality, spanning her initial reading of Plato and her most recent exploration of "inclination" (Cavarero, 2016). This materiality eludes reduction either to language or to a simple sociocultural construct. "The body is an *elementary given (un dato elementare)* that Cavarero considers a decisive *source* of vitality, an undeniable *limit* of the self, the locus of relationality, vulnerability, and dependency that as such must be taken into account, signified theoretically, and also affect the way in which we conceive of our ethics and our politics" (Guaraldo, 2022: 154). These themes are central to Cavarero's work *Stately Bodies* (1995), where she critically traces the usages of the body politic metaphor. Plato's logocentric philosophy – which aims at the unity of diverse elements – establishes a structured balance favouring the rationality of the soul over the instability of the body. This approach transforms the *polis* into a harmonised order akin to the *cosmos*, but the strict division between soul and body neglects the physical aspect. In this work, as well as in others, the concept of sexual difference, as formulated by Luce Irigaray, has significant importance in Cavarero's understanding of embodiment. Within this framework, the subject is inherently non-neutral. Simultaneously, the reconfiguration of subjectivity through the lenses of embodiment, contingency, vulnerability, and relationality is not solely aimed at dismantling patriarchy. Rather, as mentioned, she endeavours to establish an alternative framework, a distinct conceptual landscape for imagining the subject and its ethical as well as political aspects.

From this perspective, the philosophy of narrative assumes a pivotal role in examining human existence. In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (2000), Cavarero

delves into the diverse ways individuals shape their own portraits through storytelling. She addresses a range of mythological and literary figures, demonstrating the impossibility of fully grasping the singularity inherent in each subject. By extending the concept of uniqueness as elucidated by Hannah Arendt, Cavarero maintains that individual uniqueness relies on the testimony of others to exist. She emphasises relationality as critical to understanding the self: the latter cannot be purely autobiographical since it is inherently linked to others. Cavarero delves further into these concepts in *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005), where she places a particular emphasis on the significance of the voice. By exploring the uniqueness that pertains to each voice, she highlights the philosophical tendency that *Logos* has to devocalise in its abstraction from the embodied uniqueness of language. Against this move, Cavarero recaptures the physicality of the voice by mobilising a series of female archetypes, who become pivotal for the alternative canon that she constructs throughout her work.

The political dimension remains central throughout Cavarero's journey. Her later work *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (2008) scrutinises the contemporary transformation in the apparatuses of power. In this text, she introduces the neologism "horrorism", which is absent from the Italian vocabulary, to articulate the present-day landscape of violence perpetrated against the vulnerable. Against the backdrop of pervasive global violence, the canonical distinctions between "conventional" warfare and "unconventional" terrorism become increasingly indistinct. The book re-examines modern-day instances of violence via the analysis of the biopolitical practices of the present, that range from concentration camps to suicide terrorism. Without abandoning the references to the Greek myth that regularly recur in her work, Cavarero advocates for a profound shift in perspective: she urges the abandonment of the warrior's

viewpoint in favour of embracing vulnerability. This shift seeks to foster a comprehensive understanding of the opposition between victims and perpetrators, with a pronounced emphasis on fragility. The inquiry into the political dimension continues in *Surging Democracy: Notes on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought* (2021). Cavarero's intention to emphasise the generative rather than the conflictual aspect of Arendt's concept of the political implies a reclamation of the etymological sense of "surging" as "to arise", or "to well up", rather than to rise up or to stand in opposition, which commonly accompanies related terms such as "insurgency". Cavarero provides an insightful intervention into the contemporary discourse on the essence of democracy, proposing that its emergence is rooted in a non-violent and creative process, characterised by a participatory and relational power.

But how has the rich and composite trajectory of Cavarero's thought shaped her lasting legacy and contemporary reception? In what ways has her *oeuvre* influenced both Italian (feminist) literature, as previously explored, and the broader international discourse? The pieces collected in this Special Issue play with key concepts in Cavarero's lexicon, by proposing reflections that build and expand on some of the key nodes of her thought: the voice; embodied subjectivities; uniqueness; sexed thinking that disrupts the abstractness of the neutral Subject in Western thought; the feminist critique of knowledge; vulnerability as a political category; bodies as political beings, in the exposure/relation to otherness; plurality, interdependence. These often intertwined themes shape Cavarero's conceptual mosaic, which yet does not pretend to create a recognisable picture, or ultimate image. They operate, one could say, less like a carefully designed pattern and more like a loom in constant motion that ties multiple threads together to create connections and bonds. Central to this collection is not merely the act of selecting or signposting some of the most renowned themes in Cavarero's work; rather the *ensemble* of contributions that

follows tries to put these themes in dialogue with other thinkers and traditions of thought: from black feminism (Söderbäck), to queer theory (Cossutta), to contributions in contemporary democratic theory (Huzar, Butler) – a dialogue and an intricacy of voices that organically morph into a play of figures of thought (Giardini). We aim to read the collection as if we were following an embroidered tapestry in the act of its very making: running through multiple motifs and recurring themes to let new patterns emerge from the novel relation of their proximity and intertwining.

As mentioned above, the body remains a central theme that sparks attention in the contributions and works of the authors in the collection. Carlotta Cossutta, for instance, focuses on the female body and its exclusion from politics, understood since the Greek tradition as the life of the *polis*, which transcends the biological dimension of the body and of existence. Only in modernity do we see the body re-enter the political sphere, due to the transformation of the nature of power in its controlling and generative character: the body becomes central to a model of politics that focuses on the reproduction of society. Even more, practices such as increasing medicalisation and health technologies make the body an instrument of subjectification, particularly that of women. The theme of the body is equally, if not exclusively, dominant in Emma Ingala's piece, where the centrality of the body is problematised through the optic of the image and the discursive tradition. Different traditions of thought have accessed the body either via its materiality and corporeality – the tangible dimension of blood and flesh – or rather through the plethora of images through which bodies can be apprehended and captured. Ingala argues that Cavarero's philosophy plays a key and unique role in laying the ground for a reading of the body that poses the relationship between the imaginary and the corporeal as one of inseparability. By so doing, Cavarero has proved herself a timely and relevant author in contributing to current debates on the discourse/ matter

divide that populate contemporary critical theories, in which the Italian author can meaningfully intervene, precisely by blurring and demystifying the rigidity of such divides. Matter and discourse, body and images continuously interact to disrupt settled practices and images around the body in everyday experience, and by doing so, they make the body a cradle and a pivot to the formation of subjectivity, and, thus, of politics.

Along with the all-too-material, all-too-tangible dimension of the body, there is another, only apparently less palpable element of subjectivities that is central to many of the following contributions: the theme of the voice, which runs in the pieces by authors such as Huzar, Cossutta, and Bazzoni. The voice, in both its physical manifestation and function, is not exempt from finding a quite unique positioning in the divide between matter and discourse mentioned above: the voice, too, is intrinsically corporeal and, as Huzar reminds us, is expressed often in the ruthlessness and incomprehensibility of its givenness, of its sound. In this most immediate, expressive dimension, the voice needs to be put in contrast with the dominance of *logos* that pertains to the public sphere: against the universality of *logos*, reason, and philosophy, the voice is the emblem and expression of uniqueness. Also, the voice always operates outside of the constraints of the semantics of *logos*, and becomes a way of “thinking otherwise”: it is a disruption of the discourse of politics, which starts from bodies rather than reason. Politics is understood along the lines of thinking with “radical difference”, as Cossutta reminds us, with “no initial model to adhere to”.

Another recurrent theme attached to the above is that of motherhood, and the maternal body, which is foregrounded in Cavarero’s own contribution, and further developed in many of the other pieces. Across these works, motherhood functions as the conceptual linchpin for an engagement with the feminist imagination and the state of the art of feminist debates when it is re-read in its fundamental intersection with the political.

Similar to the use of the body seen above, which is central to the search for a new *political*, motherhood provides a new optic that marks the rupturing with the dominant normative order. Truthful to the constitutively concerted approach that drives the ensemble of essays, however, each of the authors in the collection interprets and expresses the *political* through a different voice: in Woodford, the rupture with the patriarchal normative order is realised via a new way of reading and enacting (motherly) love; in Butler, it is achieved through the reinterpretation of disobedience outside the presumption of individualism and selfhood; in Ingala, again, it is accomplished via a double reading of the body and the image. Söderbäck's piece speaks chiefly to a unifying attempt that may be found in each of the contributions when she argues that Cavarero's work could be described "in terms of its efforts to offer a relational ontology of uniqueness that puts the hegemony of universality into question by way of embracing the inappropriateness of embodied uniqueness".

There is, at this point, a new overarching framework that starts emerging as a result of the assembling of the contributions, and that can only be thought of when looking at them as a composite set, rather than as a coherent whole: the distinctiveness and, indeed, the "uniqueness" of the multiple voices that continue to coalesce around Cavarero's theoretical provocations emerge precisely from the way they can be narrated, brought together, not as a coherent plot but as a set of relations that emerge spontaneously and creatively from their unexpected dialogue. The focus on (the power of) narration is central, for instance, in contributions such as those of Söderbäck, D'amico, and Giardini: all the authors, if with very different angles, argue that ultimately there is no distinction between philosophy and narration in Cavarero. Narrative becomes a "counternarrative", when it intersects with other traditions of thought such as the "critical fabulation" found in Black feminist scholars: narration and the power of

(counter)narrative pertain to the same commitment to relational uniqueness.

Counternarrative, perhaps in an unexpected reversal of the arguments intimated above, for Söderbäck, is connected to the *opacity* of singularity: by imagining the possible of the impossible of one's experience, by unrooting the historically untold that cannot be narrated or affirmed because it cannot be properly known, narrative creates a new episteme that becomes the space of philosophical work. It is now the accidental – as opposed to the universal – that constitutes the very object and motive of philosophy. Crucially, in the new relational ontology of uniqueness constructed in Cavarero's work in its complexity, philosophy functions as care: "narration is the oldest form of care". We found this repeated in Woodford via the idea of nonviolent love. Care is manifested in a different form of (motherly) love that breaks the shackles of both self-sacrifice and death, both of which remain the inescapable outcome of any form of love that is articulated under the grammar of the patriarchal order. Even more, by breaking with the stereotypical versions of patriarchal love, we open up the route to reimagining care as a response against violence: care is no longer directed towards a unique individual, or sustained by a biological bond, but its relational capacity stretches, or better, inclines, towards society as a whole, driven by the unconditional love that is felt when the perspective of the "new" and of the "being otherwise" starts to fold into the possibilities of the present. Love and care, so understood, remain, therefore, fundamentally political. Once again, we move from the ethical to the political dimension, which remains the constitutive fabric of Cavarero's works and intellectual texture; the pieces in this collection are a tribute to this key lesson, even in their sometimes more critical tones.

On this backdrop, we can then begin to disentangle the individual threads of the conceptual tapestry sketched above:

Clare Woodford reflects on the complex relationship between the understanding of maternal love and the (ever-present) possibility of its ushering into violence. The article compellingly maps out the ambivalent characterisation that maternal love – central to both Cavarero’s work and to her critique of thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas – takes when it is reduced to the patriarchal stereotypical image of the mother. In the patriarchal symbolic order, motherly love is condemned to the dichotomous choice between self-sacrifice on the one hand, and the inevitability of violence (aimed at protecting her own offspring) on the other. In an original reading, Woodford shows how Cavarero’s ethics of inclination is able to sustain a model of not self-sacrificing love that can help us work towards a collective (feminist) political project oriented towards peace.

Emma Ingala’s contribution thoughtfully focuses on the question of the body from both a deconstructive and a constructive perspective. In the *pars destruens*, the author shows how Cavarero challenges the dichotomy between discourse and matter, language and nature, which is a frequent topic in contemporary critical literature and in approaches interested in (re)turning to materialist ontologies. In the *pars construens*, the author argues that Cavarero outlines a new relationship between the force of imagery and the power of the corporeal. From this perspective, the relationship between the body and the image is reconfigured as a synergic and fruitful one: it becomes an endless process of contamination that disrupts any possibility of fixing an ultimate essence.

Federica Giardini’s piece truly embodies, in style and content, the plurality of voices that the collection is inspired by: Giardini reminds us of how, in Cavarero, the voice is irremediably tied to another theme central to Cavarero’s *oeuvre*, that of singularity. Giardini traces an embroidered canvas – that, in some way, functions as a microcosm for the whole Special Issue – by putting Cavarero in dialogue with other thinkers and figures: only through this intertwined and

composite narrative, the work of Cavarero emerges in its generative uniqueness, which is never static, but always in motion, always striving to challenge dominant voices – of philosophy as well as of political practices and injustices – precisely by inclining towards novel ways of thinking.

Moving on, **Fanny Söderbäck** elaborates an original and thoughtful analysis of Cavarero's philosophy by setting it in dialogue with the work of Saidiya Hartman. The reciprocal contamination between Cavarero's narrative theory and Hartman's critical fabulation allows Söderbäck to elaborate an in-depth inquiry into the power of narrating uniqueness. The article develops the themes of uniqueness, embodiment, and relationality from different perspectives, showing the relevance of these concepts to imagine new ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political perspectives, which at the same time rediscover but also open up new possibilities, stories, lives that cannot be contained in the historical archives.

Carlotta Cossutta's piece recuperates the theme of the voice, by carving out its irredeemably political dimension. The Western tradition of political thought has sanctioned the political and public sphere as the domain of reason and (universal) rationality. In regard to this prevalently masculine, patriarchal sphere, women('s voices) have stood in a position of exclusion. What if we start from the body, rather than from the universalising dimension of *logos*? The article explores the possibility of rethinking politics starting from bodies and uniqueness, and proposes the space for an erotic relational ethics. Cavarero here enters into dialogue with Lynne Huffer's analysis of the lips as an emblem of queer female difference; the lips, through which voice is uttered, also carry the corporeality and materiality of the utterance. This becomes the basis upon which to construct an embodied and pluralistic relation beyond any linearity or dialectics.

The attention devoted to the voice, singularity, and their political potential is key to **Tim Huzar's** contribution. The

article eloquently emphasises how central to Cavarero's work is a reading of the voice as a mark of the uniqueness of one's singularity, that is not tied to or informed by *logos*. Crucially, in Cavarero, the singularity of the voice becomes especially relevant when voices are captured in their multiplicity, which brings about the question of their politicity: the plurality of voices, as an ensemble of unique voices, remains distinct from that of a mass, or an army, since it preserves the pluriphony of the phonosphere, whereas the latter simply makes uniqueness superfluous. However, Huzar also warns us of a lingering formalism that survives even in Cavarero's treatment of the voice when the latter is mobilised politically. Embracing radical uniqueness – and thus, the true power of relational politics and ethics – means getting rid of any category or abstraction, even the ones that are meant to emphasise our common “humanity”.

Alberica Bazzoni's article also helps situate Cavarero's contribution in light of recent feminist debates and *topoi*. It reminds us of the influence of Cavarero's work not only on philosophy and political thought, but also on literary criticism, which has significantly borrowed notions from Cavarero's conceptual toolkit (from inclination; to the narratable and relational self; to the deconstruction of the patriarchal symbolic order), and applied them to the interpretation of contemporary writings by women. Not only do philosophy and narration merge in Cavarero; they also undo the distinction between philosophy and literature, and contribute to the creation of a feminist imaginary. This proposition and application of Cavarero's thought to literary work is exemplified by her dialogue with the Sicilian writer Goliarda Sapienza, where narrative and the voice become integral parts of the construction of female subjectivity.

The following piece by **Marzia D'amico** brings to the choir the figure of another Italian poet and writer: Amelia Rosselli. The contribution is a profound investigation of Rosselli's poetics: her poetic texts are a creative enterprise that incarnates

– or gives voice in practice to – a particular (political) posture that constitutes inclining, and that sustains the many theoretical and ethical challenges posed by Adriana Cavarero throughout her career. Rosselli's poetics constitutes an experience at the same time textual and sexual: it inclines towards an emotional load which, by giving expression to the dimensions of interiority and emotions, articulates the profoundly political character of subjectivity, when it is understood according to the ethics of inclination. Whereas emotions and reasons have been parted in the patriarchal order, inclining not only establishes a bridge between the two, but makes feelings and dispositions the very constituents of a deeply relational, deeply caring and transformative politics.

The collection culminates in the dialogue between two authors who have historically engaged in sustained discussions despite divergences and disagreements: Judith Butler, and Adriana Cavarero herself. In her unpublished piece, **Judith Butler** reinterprets Arendt in light of the influence she has had on Cavarero and the Italian feminist tradition. The text interrogates experiences of judgement, freedom and responsibility, by staging a critique of the methodological individualism that permeates the tradition of Western philosophy and political practice. Atomised and individualised conceptions of responsibility and freedom can lead, in their most exasperated form, to the spreading of violence, fascism, and, even, femicides that we witness in contemporary politics. Can we reimagine modes of political interactions that embrace all living creatures that live in relationship to one another on an interconnected planet? This is the outcome that Butler advocates and aspires to, when political action is neither individualised nor isolated, but reimagined as concerted, performative, and plural.

The call for a more capacious (feminist) imagination grounded on an idea of nature as a generating force which encompasses all of the living, human and non-human, in a

single *cosmos* is also the point of culmination of the final contribution to the volume, that of **Adriana Cavarero** herself. Her piece invites a recuperation of the relationship between nature and the maternal body that is found in archaic cultures. Ancient cultures were grounded on a unique bond between the body of the mother and *physis*, which were assimilated under the shared principle of generativity. Whilst the Western tradition has eventually separated the notion of *physis* to match it to a universal, and thus abstracted, notion of the reproduction of the species, recuperating the original meaning of the maternal body can trace back the eternal character of nature in its dependence on the singular and the plural.

If there is something that can speak to Cavarero's thought as a whole it is precisely the tireless emphasis on embodied uniqueness that needs to be mobilised beyond the abstractness of traditional philosophy. The latter has made uniqueness irrelevant and redundant. It is from this position of erasure, of silencing, and exclusion, therefore, that a voice can also, crucially, become "irreverent": singular being can only exist not in the methodological individualism of modern politics, but rather in a plurality, in its "exposed, relational, and contextual" – or, we can now say, *inclined* – being.¹

—

References

Diotima (2009), *Potere e Politica non Sono la Stessa Cosa*. Naples: Liguori.

Garin, Eugenio (2008), *History of Italian Philosophy*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

¹ This work was supported by the *Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity, and the European Narratives*, funded by the Academy of Finland under funding Nos. 312430 and 336677.

Gentile, Giovanni (2003), *Le origini della filosofia contemporanea*. Firenze: Le Lettere.

Gentili, Dario, and Elettra Stimilli (2018), “Introduction. Alternative Narrative and Political Operation”, in *Italian Critical Thought. Genealogies and Categories*, Eds. Dario Gentili, Elettra Stimilli and Glenda Garelli. London: Rowman and Littlefield., 8–13.

Guaraldo, Olivia (2022), “Adriana Cavarero”, in *The Bloomsbury Italian Philosophy Reader*, Eds. Michael Lewis and David Rose. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 153–156.

Esposito, Roberto (2012), *Living Thought. The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Spaventa, Bertrando (2009), *Carattere e Sviluppo della Filosofia Italiana dal secolo XVI sino al Nostro Tempo (1860)*, in *Opere*, Ed. Francesco Valagussa. Milan: Bompiani.