

Absolute Metaphors and Metaphors of the Maternal

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The pregnant female body and, more generally, the generative process *tout court* have been linked with metaphors since the dawn of Western philosophy, though this history has only recently been taken up and critically discussed (Rigotti 2010; Cavarero 1995). The research hypothesis I test in this paper is that pregnancy and childbirth ought to be considered as absolute metaphors, as per their “indissoluble alogicality” (Blumenberg 2010). Following the analyses presented in *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, the goal of the article is to enhance dialogue between Blumenberg’s conception of the metaphor and those philosophical reflections that focus on the pervasiveness of metaphors concerning pregnancy and childbirth. This paper is therefore an investigation on the link between female reproductive functions and philosophical knowledge.

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Towards an Archaeology of Absolute Metaphors

In this section, I give an overview of Hans Blumenberg's philosophical analyses of the metaphor to highlight the role played by metaphorical expressions of the maternal sphere within Western philosophy. This section sets the bases for the core argument of this paper, which is that a particular family of metaphors broadly employed in philosophical expressions—the maternal metaphors, as I define them—ought to be framed within Blumenberg's conception of absolute metaphors. The thesis I present and discuss in this paper is that there is a reciprocal movement linking female reproductive functions to philosophical knowledge expressed in metaphorical terms.

To frame the relevance played by the maternal metaphors in the history of Western philosophical conceptualization, it is necessary to illuminate the philosophical understanding of metaphors. Blumenberg has worked in the direction of treating the metaphor not as a flawed or impoverished concept but as a foundational heuristic tool for philosophical reflection. In his 1960 book *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, Blumenberg claims that metaphors are not mere pre-logical structures that would simply facilitate the crystallization of concepts. Blumenberg's understanding of metaphors challenges the Aristotelian legacy, which holds that metaphors are nothing more than a rhetorical artifice. As such, the metaphor should have merely argumentative applications, in that «it contributes only to the effect of a statement, the 'punchiness' with which it gets through to its political and forensic addressees» (Blumenberg 2010, 2). This misconception of the heuristic value of metaphor is intrinsically linked with an understanding of rhetoric as a set of devices aimed at the embellishment of language, the aesthetic and epistemic dimensions of which are reduced to the elegance of the speech. [1] Contra an understanding of the metaphor as a useful and auxiliary tool for argumentation purposes, Blumenberg articulates a concept of metaphor as a fundamental building block of philosophical expression. In this respect, his conception of metaphor differs profoundly from that which is central to new rhetoric (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958; Perelman 1979). As Rigotti (1995) well notes, Perelman has a reductive view of the role of metaphors within philosophical speculation, in that they are seen as useful tools for organizing argumentation, but they cannot shape the whole philosophical conceptual system (Rigotti 1995, 37).

Blumenberg took up this weak conception of the metaphor just to show its intrinsic epistemic limits; [2] the metaphor is framed as an aesthetic medium «precisely because it is both native to the original sphere of concepts and because it is continually liable and has to vouch for the deficiency of concepts and the limits of what they can achieve» (Blumenberg 2020, 269). The polemical afflatus of Blumenberg's analysis is primarily oriented toward an understanding of philosophy as a scientific venture which must be expressed through pure conceptual language:

[1] See also Blumenberg's analysis of rhetoric as linked with different conceptions of what language is and what language may do: language as expression, communication, and speech act (Blumenberg 2020, 291).

[2] On the role of rhetoric in Blumenberg's intellectual project, see also the analysis in Tedesco (2012).

Philosophical language would be purely and strictly “conceptual”: everything can be defined, therefore everything must be defined; there is no longer anything logically “provisional”. [...] From this vantage point, all forms and elements of figurative speech, in the broadest sense of the term, prove to have been makeshifts destined to be superseded by logic (Blumenberg 2010, 2).

In this reappraisal of metaphors as a heuristic tool, Blumenberg develops his doctrine of metaphorology as a complementary (and necessary) inquiry into the history of ideas: metaphorology is the discipline that presents itself as an unfinished part of the history of concepts, as an investigation into the historical development and self-understanding of philosophy. Blumenberg overthrows the Aristotelian prejudice by arguing that metaphors are foundational elements of the philosophical exercise, bearers of meaning, and authentic expressions of reality. Metaphorical language should not be understood as the raw material that feeds conceptualization at a higher level but instead as an original way of expressing a worldview [Weltanschauung].

Metaphors do not exhaust themselves in acting as a substratum or catalyst for abstract operations precisely because knowledge does not coincide with conceptualization (Blumenberg 2020a). They instead constitute an active and permanent orientation of thought—namely an original way of giving meaning to reality. The metaphorical way of expressing and thinking through philosophical inquiry should not be regarded as a guiding sphere of hesitant theoretical conceptions, i.e., as a preliminary sphere of concept formation (Blumenberg 2010). Within the scope of the tasks of the author, the treatment of metaphoric discourse, which until there belonged to the chapter of figures of rhetoric, has an exemplary function. Metaphors function in the realm of typicality: the relationship between modes of life and modes of metaphor is not extrinsic but exhibits a certain historicity. This should not mislead us: metaphors are historically determined—to the extent that one can speak of a Copernican revolution with and after Copernicus, to take up an example from Blumenberg (2010)—but they belong to the sphere of the transcendental, in that they deal with the conditions of the knowability and expressibility of a given phenomenon. [3]

Along these lines, a particular kind of metaphor functions as the constitutive element of philosophy—namely, the absolute metaphor. Absolute metaphors «“answer” the supposedly naïve, in principle unanswerable questions whose relevance lies quite simply in the fact that they cannot be brushed aside, since we do not pose them ourselves but find them already posed in the ground of our existence» (Blumenberg 2010, 14). As foundational elements of philosophical reflections, they exhibit a «conceptually irredeemable expressive function» (Blumenberg 2010, 3). In the constant—and ancient—reference to the relationship between metaphor and truth, absolute metaphors offer a pragmatic truth, and unveil specific orientations towards reality, by determining «a particular attitude or conduct [Verhalten]» (Blumenberg 2010, 14). They are foundational as far as they give expression to non-understandable and in principle non-conceptualizable parts of reality and, as grounding blocks of the philosophical

[3] See the correlation between metaphor and symbol, as outlined by Blumenberg with reference to the philosophical work of Kant. Blumenberg suggests that «one can easily see that the expression “symbolic” for Kant means nothing other than “metaphorical,” certainly with an accent in the direction of the *absolute* metaphor» (Blumenberg 2020, 287).

thought, they could not be explained by means of other metaphors or concepts. Their historical roots emerge in their capacity to express original conceptions of the world, reality, knowledge, and the place of human beings in the kosmos. In Blumenberg's terms,

They indicate the fundamental certainties, conjectures, and judgments in relation to which the attitudes and expectations, actions and inactions, longings and disappointments, interests and indifferences, of an epoch are regulated (Blumenberg 2010, 14).

These metaphors are absolute in that they express a horizon of practical knowledge that touches at the very heart of human sense-making. From this point of view, they weave together the surreptitious epistemic distinction between logos and mythos. As Blumenberg argues,

The difference between myth and "absolute metaphor" would here be a purely genetic one: myth bears the sanction of its primordial, unfathomable origin, its divine or inspirative ordination, whereas metaphor can present itself as a figment of the imagination, needing only to disclose a possibility of understanding in order for it to establish its credentials (Blumenberg 2010, 78).

Both mythical and metaphorical expressions contribute to a body of knowledge that should not be considered as primitive or pre-logical, but rather as representative of aspects of reality that surpass or exceed conceptualisation. In *Paradigms*, some pages are devoted to the analysis of Plato's myths, which are conceived as non-homogeneous means of enunciation. Moving from the Platonic reappraisal of mythical material, Blumenberg argues that the dualism between mythos and logos—according to which mythos was a pre-logical phenomenon later replaced by the crystalline logicity of logos—proves to be totally inadequate. In his reading, Platonic allegory of the cave may be situated in that liminal space between mythos and logos. The cave appears as the location of an original scene rooted, Blumenberg says (2010), in the mythical tradition. [4] The cave tale presupposes an ideal process of human fulfilment and self-elevation which has its roots in «primitive» mythical representation. As such, and by virtue of its «indissoluble alogicality» (Blumenberg 2010, 78), the allegory of the cave has worked as a model for gnoseological processes. Far more than that, this tale gives a sense of who human beings are, what they can achieve through knowledge, and how they can free themselves from superstitions and false beliefs.

In light of these multi-layered gnoseological and ethical meanings, Irigaray's interpretation, provided in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), discloses a fracture in the alleged universality of the tale by revealing the feminine element implied and hidden therein. In Irigaray's reading, the Platonic cave [antre] is a metaphor for a matrix or for the earth, ultimately referring to the maternal womb. Socrates explains that human beings [anthropoi] [5] dwell underground in an abode that has the form of a cave. Earth, cave, dwelling: these expressions, Irigaray argues, refer to the semantic sphere of the womb [ustherà]. The metaphoric mechanism

[4] The most comprehensive work by the author on the figure of the cave is Blumenberg (1989).

[5] Irigaray points out that the Greek word *anthropoi* has been translated with "men": this translation is exemplificative of the collapse of the masculine into the universal that Irigaray, along with other prominent

underlying this original scene is inscribed in a deletion of the maternal, which, according to Irigaray (1985) founds all Western philosophical venture:

Here is an attempt at making metaphor, at trying out detours, which not only is a silent prescription for Western metaphysics but also, more explicitly, proclaims (itself as) everything publicly designated as metaphysics, its fulfilment, and its interpretation. (Irigaray 1985, 243).

Irigaray thus contributes to a disclosure of the original metaphorization of the maternal. [6] Her analysis responds to the metaphorological enterprise of describing absolute metaphors. This task is primarily an archaeological search for the unthought and the forgotten which, as such, has nevertheless acted (Melandri 1967). If we take seriously Blumenberg's invitation to inquire into the self-representation of philosophy through its metaphorical apparatus, we then may unveil some hitherto overlooked aspects of thought that suggest something about how philosophy understands its own scopes, limits, methods, and possibilities. In his terms, «our typology of metaphor histories must accordingly endeavour to distinguish and work through particular aspects—new aspects, perhaps—of philosophy's historical self-understanding» (Blumenberg 2010, 77. My emphasis).

figures in *la pensée de la différence* and *il pensiero della differenza*, has unveiled and worked through.

[6] A further element related to this myth has to do with the ways in which we conceive and articulate the Self in Western thought. As Cavarero has recently pointed out, «In the myth of the cave, there is already an intimation of the subject, which is the philosopher, who stands up, changes direction, ascends, and then contemplates the sun and stands vertically in the direction of the Good. It is a self-sufficient subject, or, to say the least, its story is the narration of a story of self-sufficiency. In my view, this is the greatest fallacy of the entire Western metaphysics: the idea of the ego, self-created and self-sufficient» (Cavarero & Lawtoo 2021, 186).

Maternal Metaphors

Among the new aspects that one may re-discover, maternal metaphors occupy a paradoxical place: despite their diffusion and primacy in expressing the process of knowledge, little attention has been paid to their material origins. Quite the opposite, as much effort has been made in maintaining their origins hidden, treating them as irrelevant and forgettable. For an archaeology of the absolute metaphors of the maternal, the starting point must consist in recognizing that these metaphors marked the history of philosophy, referring to acts and events pertaining to the maternal sphere. On this matter, one must come to terms with a feminist tradition that has denounced the omission of the material dimension of pregnancy from the philosophical understanding of human generation via metaphorical effacement. The pregnant female body and, more generally, the generative process tout court have been linked with metaphors since the dawn of Western philosophy, in a parallel history that has only recently been taken up and critically discussed. From the spiritual pregnancy of the Symposium—in which Diotima designates the axiological superiority over the mere reproduction of bodies with a reversal worthy of the most elegant Socratic irony—to the myth of the cave in the Republic, the intersections between pregnant body, generation, and metaphorical processes have imprinted Western philosophy as a whole. This metaphorical horizon assumes relevance and pervasiveness in the overall de-materialization of pregnancy, in which references to the maternal are omitted. These references indicate activities and processes which are peculiarly and

exclusively feminine, in the sense that only biological female bodies can perform them. The mechanism that grounds what has been defined as the removal of birth or matricide (in Irigaray's terms) functions through the employment of a feminine feature—e.g., the generative potential of gestating and birthing—to indicate something else—e.g., the generation of ideas. This linguistic and philosophical lack of acknowledgement that the human self comes from somewhere—and specifically from a female body—has been fraught with consequences for philosophical conceptualizations of the self. In Francesca Rigotti's *Partorire con il corpo e la mente* (2010), it is clearly demonstrated that, at least since Plato, the «male appropriation of female reproduction» has increased steadily in a quite sophisticated way. Being part of what she defines as the «Arianna's paradox» (22), the process of pregnancy has received the same treatment of other activities, typically performed by women, that are regarded as insignificant and minor (*artes minores*). Things change if the same activities are transfigured within a process of «metaphorical purification», through which they eventually become worthy of men (Rigotti 2010, 22). Saying it otherwise, it is necessary to distance oneself from concrete things and move towards abstraction. This was the case with spinning and weaving, which have always been considered female jobs, and therefore unimportant and merely practical. Still, when they are purified and sublimated through metaphorical transfiguration, an act like that of sewing becomes worthy of a male hero like Theseus (Rigotti 2010, 23). The paradoxical aspect that Rigotti unveils is that the semantic sphere of conceiving, gestating, and giving birth is borrowed from the women's sphere, but the feminine is not recognized as the material and experiential horizon that founds these metaphorical apparatuses. On the contrary, the materiality of maternal experiences (the flesh, the blood, the lived body) is belittled.

The result of this theft is the appropriation of generation by the male mind—not of children but of ideas (Rigotti 2010, 21; see also Rigotti 2010, 80). Intellectual production and biological re-production are then set against each other in axiological terms: if creation is the act of the mind that brings something new into existence, procreation is the mere act of the body in reproducing the species. Children are products of a nature that creates itself through women; ideas are the free creation of male minds. The hierarchy is set up in the polarisation of these two modalities of making, to the point that the man is the one who actually conceives ideas in the brain, while the woman conceives the child in the womb (e.g., Rigotti 2010, 25). This axiological system of binary oppositions thus goes as far as to affirm that mental creation (namely creativity) is the exclusive domain of men, thus relegating all forms of non-mental production to the feminine. As Friedman poignantly illustrates, the pregnant body is necessarily female, while the pregnant mind is the mental province of the male genius (Friedman 1987, 56-57).

Rigotti's theses go hand in hand with Adriana Cavarero's analyses in texts such as *In Spite of Plato* (1995/1991) or *Relating Narratives* (2014/1997), where it is argued that human activities and characteristics relating to the feminine are consistently dismissed within the history of philosophy and female figures are seen as the antithesis of wisdom. [7] Within this literature, it is shown that these metaphors employed by male philosophers refer to female

[7] See for example the figures of the Thracian Maid in Cavarero (1995) – cf. Blumenberg (2015).

reproductive activities, but the materiality of these activities is omitted. The event of childbirth is transfigured into an abstract concept, resulting in the erasure of the gestating and birthing self. Irigaray has unpacked the ethical, ontological, and epistemic consequences that derive from «the problem of the womb becoming a metaphor for ‘matter’ and space’ at the expense of mothers» (Aristarkhova 2012, 21), arguing that the Western attitude towards the lived experience of pregnancy and the erasure of the maternal self are matricidal moves. As she states, «What is now becoming apparent in the most everyday things and in the whole of our society and culture is that, at a primal level, they function on the basis of a matricide» (Irigaray 1991, 36).

The fact that feminine activities are transfigured through the metaphorical filter is a cultural event that suggests something about the organization of family, gender roles, and parenting in Western societies. As historian Nadia Filippini outlines, the conception of human reproduction (how it works, the role played by women, the possibility of predicting pregnancy’s outcomes etc.) are subject to cultural representation and are inscribed in social, institutional, and cultural histories: «It was the very idea of generation and birth that changed over time, as did that of the foetus, forcing a reassessment of its relationship with its mother’s body» (Filippini 2020, 2). Conversely, Filippini makes clear that some theoretical constructions underlying human reproduction tend to be invariant: an example of these cultural constructs—that, I add, also inform the philosophical comprehension of the pregnancy process—«has consistently played down its value in a variety of ways [...] by overstating men’s contribution to generation, or by contrasting it with other abilities and generative powers in a subtle game of hierarchies and supremacy, which ended up causing a ‘philosophical removal’ of birth» (Filippini 2020, 9).

Overall, it has been argued that cultural constructs have consistently downplayed the value of pregnancy in numerous ways, specifically through the filter of metaphors, such that the gestational process is abstracted from its own materiality and identified with spiritual pregnancy. Regarding the metaphorization of the pregnant lived experience, Tyler states that,

Philosophy has thrived upon using metaphors of gestation for the renewal of masculine models of being and creativity, while simultaneously and repeatedly disavowing maternal origin in its theories and models of subjectivity (Tyler 2000, 91).

The correlation between the metaphorization of the gestational process, the male appropriation, and the identification between reproduction and passivity leads to a sharp distinction between the male activity of mental production and the female passivity of physical reproduction; this axiologically-imbued divide is also operative in defining what the pregnant embodiment is and what it can do. This further sense in which pregnancy has been metaphorized in Western philosophy and culture emerges through the notion of the matrix, of which a declension has been the Platonic concept of chora. In Aristarkhova’s reading, the appropriation of the notion of the matrix within mathematical language and field is a strategy conceptually related to a long history of appropriation and transfiguration of the material dimension of pregnant experience into an abstract idea. As she specifies,

The metaphoric operations on the matrix have resulted in its twentieth-century definitions: on the one hand, it is an originary place from which all things develop and come into being; on the other hand, it is constituted as the most abstract, mathematically inspired notion of spatial arrangement of numbers, items, ideas, and systems (Aristarkhova 2012: 38).

Under this perspective, the appropriative abstraction of the notion of matrix—as something separated and in principle forgetful of the maternal dimension—is inscribed into the wider history of metaphorization of pregnant experience; in Aristarkhova’s words (2012: 14), «this mathematical nomenclature is enacted as a classical metaphorical operation—it mines the semantic associations with the womb and the maternal even while distancing its meanings from the maternal body». The metaphorical appropriation of the absolute generativity of the pregnant embodiment combines with the ideas of receptivity and productivity; conveniently enough, the current notion of matrix elides its reference to the maternal body, although it maintains its generative properties. In mathematical, biological, and philosophical discourses, the only relationship that still stands between the matrix and the maternal is in the etymological history of the concept; Aristarkhova notes how, from the twentieth century, the notion of Chora has been integrated in philosophical and architectural discourses as a complementary notion to that of space, specifically because it enhances senses of «heterogeneity, becoming, unfolding, and welcoming» (Aristarkhova 2012: 17). In a complementary fashion to this history of effacement and omission, not only has the pregnant embodiment failed to be recognized in its original generative dimension—as a place of co-constitution and emerging identities—, but it also has been reduced from a place of sense-making to a space of sub-personal and mechanistic processes.

If this feminist objection stands, and the philosophical discourse actually has built its metaphorical apparatus by drawing on maternal processes only to erase them afterwards, what are then the operations that may counteract and rethink this tendency? Aristarkhova recognizes that metaphors are not harmful per se, but that philosophical debates necessitate an engagement with the lived experience of the maternal. When discussing the philosophical implications inherent the Platonic chora she notes that,

the metaphor itself, as a figure of speech, is not in question here; rather, we must explore what relation it has to “actual” mothers and why, in this case, “mother” must become a metaphor to be legitimately included in cosmology (Aristarkhova 2012: 25).

Her call is consistent with the thesis that metaphors may acquire a problematic dimension when, in the philosophical discourse, no space is made for the actual lived experiences of the maternal—inclusive of gestation, natality, generativity, and birth. [8] The feminist call to ‘speak up’ about the materiality of the maternal is the other side of the well-attested attitude towards maternal metaphorization, which is a rhetorical symptom of Arendt’s idea that Western philosophy prioritized mortality at the expenses of natality (Arendt 2013/1958)—in this case, natality is disguised as the cognitive process of knowing.

[8] As for an inquiry into the relationship between pregnancy, metaphor, and reappraisals of lived experience in artistic expressions, see e.g., Mullin (2002).

Plato's ways of presenting his gnoseological theses have been considered symptomatic of this wider attitude. In platonic dialogues, feminist commentators have detected rhetorical modes and metaphorical constructions of the maternal that on the long run have influenced the Western approach to do philosophy. In compliance with the *maieutikê technê*, Socrates helps his interlocutors to give birth to the truth. The Socratic maieutic targets men—and not women—, providing for birthing souls and not birthing bodies (*Theaetetus* 150b: 25). This method involves the exercise of dialogue—namely in questions and answers that lead the interlocutor to search within himself for the truth, determining it as autonomously as possible. In the *Theaetetus*, it is detailed one of the pillar aspects of Platonic gnoseology, the description of which relies on the material practice of giving birth: just as the midwife helps the parturient to reach her goal without replacing her, so Socrates aims to bring the truth out of the person without giving him the ultimate answers to his own questions (149a-c). Socrates' mission of midwifery is then rooted within a metaphorical mechanism; the same relationship occurring *peri physis* between the child-to-be and the labouring woman constitutes the knowledge process of the man in search of that Truth of which he is pregnant. The maternal metaphors in the *Theaetetus* are transparent. The terms of comparison are made explicit, and their relation is clearly elucidated. On the contrary, in certain passages of the *Symposium* the situation gets more complicated, to the point that Cavarero (1995) speaks of Diotima's speech in terms of a «total mimesis of the maternal». The act of philosophizing is mimetic to the maternal experience: the pregnant and labouring man, as well as the male midwife, attain the place of emblematic figures of the philosophical exercise itself (Cavarero 1995). To grasp the specificity of Diotima's speech, one should consider both who enunciates the speech and its content. [9] Diotima's intervention in the dialogue dedicated to the nature of Love has some specific features that make it a *unicum* in Plato's production, precisely because of her physical absence. [10] Her words are indeed reported by Socrates, but the theses for which she argued are put in her mouth by Plato himself. Plato made a woman (a foreign woman!) present his thesis in a speech that is discussed in a gathering for men only. Furthermore, she has the task of presenting a discourse that encapsulates the founding elements of the patriarchal symbolic order, which excludes women themselves from the exercise of knowledge. The mechanism of expropriation is then made both more subtle and more effective by the use of a language borrowed from the experience of the maternal, the only trace of which can be seen in the metaphorical process itself. The scenic and rhetorical organization of Diotima's speech ought to be understood as a matricidal scene, and indeed a very sophisticated one, since it is not accomplished through an abstract and disembodied language (as it happened in Parmenides,

[9] Since an in-depth analysis of the speech is beyond the scope of this paper, I focus on passages that restore the complexity and the stratification of maternal metaphors in the *Symposium*.

[10] See especially in details 204d–209e, which corresponds to Diotima's speech. This theme has received much attention. See e.g., in chronological order: Burnyeat (1977); Plass (1978); Tomin (1987); Pender (1992); Rawson (2006).

Cavarero 1995), but rather with a lexicon rooted in the «mimesis of pregnancy» (Cavarero 1995). Diotima explains that some men generate physically, while others conceive spiritually: if the result of the former is a creature of the flesh, the result of the latter are creatures of spirit and mind, namely virtue and wisdom—in the best cases, moderation and justice (Symposium 209a: 90). The matricide is fully accomplished: the bodily realm is inferior to the spiritual sphere, the human reproduction is a biological necessity—at best, a resource for the society—and the creation of ideas is the proper human activity. In this kaleidoscopic mimetic staging, the female voice and the male thought are merged and confused [con-fusi] (Cavarero 1995). The abundantly employed metaphors of generation, pregnancy, and childbirth serve in this way a philosophical discourse that excludes the feminine and the maternal both practically—women did not do philosophy—and epistemically—the philosophical knowledge and praxis are not from neither for women.

From the perspective of feminist philosophies, the inquiry into the maternal metaphors is configured both as an archaeological inquiry and as a future task. The plundering of the materiality of the maternal in metaphorical expression—which, as we have seen, specifically concerns the metaphorical horizon of knowledge—intersects with the prominence and longevity they have had in the history of philosophy. If we assume that metaphors are sites of sense-making that unveil some otherwise hidden aspects of reality, what is the potential of maternal metaphors in the self-understanding of philosophy?

I argue that the maternal insinuates itself into the patriarchal symbolic order specifically through metaphorical expression. Although the feminine is excluded from the conceptual treatment of all Western philosophy—which sets as an inescapable premise the cancellation of the datum of sexuality, the universalization of the masculine (Cavarero 1995, Diotima 1987, Tommasi 2004), and the matricidal move of forgetting natality (Irigaray 1992, Arendt 2013)—, it returns in unexpected ways in the enunciation of the cognitive process itself, in a movement that retaliates against the patriarchal symbolic order. The inclusion of the feminine and the maternal in Western philosophy has gone through a process of annihilation of the maternal itself and through the failure of explicitly recognising that maternal is the fertile ground from which the metaphorical production of knowledge arose. Nonetheless, in the attempts to forget the maternal origin of thought, the symbolic patriarchal system has failed to renounce to the feminine. On the contrary—and malgré its best efforts—the maternal has insinuated itself into the texture of philosophical expression and has funded the heart of Western inquiry on the limits, the modes, and the potentials of knowledge.

We witness the therapeutic role of metaphors (Bodei 1967) at work, which is indicative of the excess of the Lifeworld compared to the rigidity and, ultimately, the insufficiency of rigorous philosophical expression. On this issue, in the introductory essay of the Italian edition of *Shipwreck with Spectator* (1985), Remo Bodei speaks of metaphors as forms of healing: the metaphor fills the gap of a wound and heals it, as an anomaly in conceptual thought, by welcoming it into its surrounding fabric. In a polemical and controversial way, maternal metaphors have worked as absolute metaphors: they could not be explained through other metaphors, nor

one can employ concepts in lieu of them. I welcome the suggestion proposed by Rigotti, who states that

Concepts such as generation, conception, pregnancy and birth, genealogy, paternity etc. form a field of discourse, a homogeneous metaphorical field, an “absolute metaphor” in the Blumenbergian sense, according to which spiritual production is continuously represented as natural reproduction (Rigotti 2010, 79. My translation).

The generative feminine power—expressed in the bodily and existential occurrences related to the maternal experiences—provides an embodied and material ground from which gnoseological theories may flourish. These absolute metaphors are originated in a primordial horizon that we share as human beings: they are already—and always—there, in that mysterious and communal origin that is our coming-into-being.

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