Points of Contact:

Reading Clarice Lispector
in
Contemporary Italian Feminist Philosophy

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ABSTRACT:

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This project follows a thread of citations of the work of Brazilian author Clarice Lispector found in the philosophical feminist texts of four European thinkers: Hélène Cixous, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rosi Braidotti. I explore the intersection of material feminisms, Latin American decolonial feminism, and sexual difference theory differentially and multiply across contexts. I revisit histories of women and texts - French, Italian and Brazilian - that are multiply and differentially marginalized in the current Western feminist narrative framework - in order to create sources of alternative knowledge and create an opportunity for something new to emerge symbio-creatively from these points of contact. Chapter One covers the genesis of European feminist approaches to Lispector’s oeuvre in France, the impassioned reading by Hélène Cixous of Lispector’s work, and also provides vital counter-memory, decolonial feminist stories on Brazilian and Latin American feminisms which have been left out of the dominant Anglo-American/Western feminist historical narrative. Chapter Two will focus on the arrival in Italy of Lispector’s texts, Luisa Muraro and the Diotima women’s feminist philosophy group’s readings. Chapter Three then covers Adriana Cavarero, as well as her split from said Diotima group. Finally, Chapter Four brings us to Rosi Braidotti, from her early texts on Lispector to present theoretical horizons. My concluding discussion stems from the idea of connections as posited by Sonia Alvarez: “a translocal feminist politics of translation is crucial to
the decolonial turn and a key strategy in building ‘connectant epistemologies’ in order to confront the equivocations or mistranslations that hinder feminist alliances, even among women who share the same language and culture.”¹ I expand on my theory of points of contact and explore possibilities of symbiosis and non-deterministic evolution as a theoretical tool.

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I love you all!
For my babies

Noam and Darwin
Onde estivestes de noite
que de manhã regressais
com o ultra-mundo nas veias,
entre flores abissais?

Estivemos no mais longe
que a letra pode alcançar:
leendo o livro de Clarice,
mistério e chave do ar.

—Carlos Drummond de Andrade
INTRODUCTION:

UN FILO DI CLARICE

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;
it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;
it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties.

It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.

—Donna Haraway

Mas exatamente o que não quero é a moldura.

—Clarice Lispector

I have a story to tell you: I found un filo di Arianna woven through the texts of three feminist philosophers: Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero and Rosi Braidotti. I followed the thread and the journey it has taken me on has resulted in this project. What is the filo? A name. Clarice Lispector. I found un filo di Clarice woven into the texts of Italian feminist philosophers and as a Brazilian finding Clarice Lispector again and again in these texts came as quite a surprise but

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could be no coincidence. Slowly, as I followed the thread of Clarice, an ongoing, long term citation practice unraveled, revealing on the one hand a feminist intellectual micro-genealogy, and on the other a map of the material history of Clarice Lispector’s writing and its repercussions as it traveled from Brazil to Europe.

At the core of this project lies an entanglement of issues involving translation and citation practices, canonicity and systems of knowledge. I borrow the notion of a citation practice from Clare Hemmings’s *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, in which she draws our attention to the political ramifications of citation practices and how they have contributed to the cementing of a dominant, Western feminist history and canon. For Hemmings, citation is the primary technique through which people and approaches are assigned an era, positioned as pivotal to key shifts in theoretical direction, or written out of the past or present. She exhorts us to question: “How might feminist theory generate a proliferation of stories about its recent past that more accurately reflect the diversity of perspectives within (or outside) its orbit?” I hope to use this project as an opportunity to, as Hemmings puts it, do feminist theory differently. Using Lispector as a frame, I follow the translation and prolific citation practices that tell the story of the formation of a micro-genealogy of feminist thinkers of sexual difference: Hélène Cixous, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rosi Braidotti. Examining said thinkers’ readings of Lispector is, I argue, an invaluable tool for both parsing how their thinking converges and diverges over time, and understanding their shifting statuses in local and Western feminist canons; these same translations and practices also tell the story of the material apparatus of

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5 Ibid.
Brazilian author Clarice Lispector’s texts in France and Italy, with a particular emphasis on her 1964 novel *The Passion According to G.H.*. How does the feminist attention Lispector receives in Europe impact her status at home in Brazil and abroad?

Is how I just framed my project doing feminist theory differently enough? No, not quite. The problem is the frame itself and the directionality: Lispector is much more than a frame. Using Lispector as a frame marginalizes her as ornamental, while also pinning the four French/Italian thinkers inside, leaving no room for movement, connections, or creativity. A frame is confining and limiting even if we swap and center Lispector, displacing the Europeans to the margin. Displacement is the opposite of my feminist intention. I want to move to movement - let’s free ourselves from the frame!

Instead of the frame of my story, I want to shift to an interpretation of the Lispector citations as *points of contact*. And if we diffract our reading - to borrow a term from Donna Haraway - we can tell a multiplicity of stories instead of the one-directional story I outlined above. Haraway’s diffraction is “an invented category of semantics” that builds on and contests metaphors we habitually use to describe practices of knowing and living:

Diffraction, thus, is a significant ‘subject-shifter’. It shifts the subjects of critique and – if we leap to Karen Barad’s quantum understanding of diffraction – it even shifts the foundational ontological and epistemological presuppositions that condition these subject-formations. With Barad’s quantized diffraction, a relational ontology emerges that can no longer be categorically separated from its epistemological processes. Quantized diffraction becomes ‘entangled’: as *both* method of engagement and radically immanent world(ing) where relationality/differentiation are *primary* dynamics of all material-discursive entanglements. Ontology and epistemology become inter-/intra-laced as onto-epistemology.6

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Barad’s quantum diffraction derives from Niels Bohr’s “two-slit experiment,” in which he sought to determine conclusively if light is a particle or a wave. Bohr’s paradoxical conclusion was that under certain conditions light indeed behaves as a particle and under others as a wave.\(^7\) In other words, it is both, depending how you look at it. Barad captures the crucial takeaway: “the nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the apparatus.”\(^8\) This notion of the relational existence of being has wide-ranging implications. In the case of my project, if we jump into Barad’s onto-epistemological shift we can, as Kaiser and Thiele propose, “depart from discrete, given entities as units of analysis and consider agential forces (selves, cultures, objects, etc.) as processually, relationally and asymmetrically produced (all at once).”\(^9\) Barad calls this focus on the process of the interaction of the material and the cultural “agential realism.”\(^10\) In this light, we can look at all of the “agential forces” of my story and how they relate to each other differentially, simultaneously, diffractively, instead of a straightforward but reductive “Lispector’s feminist reception in Italy.”

The result is that my story will not be as “neat” as I described it initially, above; instead, by changing apparatuses, I hope to generate a proliferation of interrelated and interrelating stories that take as their starting point the *filo di Clarice*. The apparatus I have already begun using to diffract my reading of the *filo* is material feminism (also known as science feminism or

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\(^9\) Kaiser and Thiele, 166.

new materialism); the second apparatus will be Latin American decolonial feminism. For Rosi Braidotti, Barad’s new onto-epistemological paradigm defines “the process-oriented, relational, and fundamentally affective structure of subjectivity and knowledge production.”¹¹ She notes, reading Iris van Der Turin, that “this approach encourages the constitution of a trans-disciplinary perspective that combines feminist science studies, postcolonial studies, and Deleuzian feminism in a new brand of third-wave feminist materialism.”¹² My project is most definitely trans-disciplinary: I observe how material feminism, Latin American decolonial feminism, and sexual difference theory (and to some degree Deleuzian feminism in Braidotti’s work) interact.

Decolonial feminism is inseparable from colonialism and differs from post-colonialism in the belief that the coloniality of power is still alive and well in a different guise; it builds “from traditions of black/women of color/Third World women feminisms to develop a political epistemic perspective against the multiple regimes of domination (capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, racism)” and draws from “vernacular knowledges of indigenous and Afro-descendant subaltern communities.”¹³ In “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” María Lugones argues that “a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on the colonized in the service of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women.”¹⁴ Hence, “indigenous peoples and

¹² Ibid.
enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species,” and the colonized non-human female was “racialized and reinvented as a woman through Western gender codes.”15 Thus, in Claudia de Lima Costa’s reading, Lugones sees gender as an imposition of coloniality; she relocates gender to the center of the concept of the coloniality of power which, as outlined by thinkers such as Anibal Quijano, still rests on a binary/heterosexual/patriarchal view of power as disputes for the control of sex.16 For Quijano, gender is subordinated to the superior-inferior hierarchy of racial classification; for Lugones, race and gender are powerful and interdependent fictions.17 She declares, coining the term: “I call the analysis of racialized, capitalist, gender oppression ‘the coloniality of gender.’ I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender ‘decolonial feminism.’”18 Costa suggests that although gender is an equivocal category, (in terms of cultural translation) “perhaps we will be able to take a more productive path, one that has already been partially trodden by many feminists — Latin American indigenous feminists and Western feminists of science — who are rethinking the boundaries between the human and the non-human, between matter and discourse, bringing other earth beings into the conversation.”19


16 Quijano considers “control of gender and sexuality (family, education)” a category of coloniality of power. A great place to start reading on the decolonial is the special issue of Cultural Studies 21.2-3 (2007), which contains Quijano’s seminal article “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” as well as essays on decolonial studies from Walter Mignolo and others. Also of interest besides the Lugones articles cited on previous page: Walter Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistecide (Boulder: Paradigm, 2014).


18 Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 747.

The decolonial turn in Latin American feminism seeks to fundamentally do away with the dominant dichotomous Eurocentric paradigms which sustain the coloniality of gender, including the split between nature and culture. As Costa notes in reflecting on the interactions of North and Latin American feminisms:

…in the North-South axis, feminists in the North are seen as the abstract mind for the concrete body of feminists in the South. In other words, despite such travels and dislocations, “theory” still continues to stand under the sign of the West (Bhabha 1988), which in turn remains to this day the archival source of knowledge on non-Western locations (Niranjana 1992).

Hence the Latin American nature-body is written upon by Northern culture-mind. The uniformity of representations of Western feminist trajectories, of a constructed “shared” history, according to Hemmings, has cemented a dominant narrative and Western feminist canon that aligns with global power structures (in other words, feminist theory has not escaped falling into hegemonic power patterns). Decolonial feminism does not seek a neat reversal of the directionality of the North-South axis of knowledge; its project is the decolonization of Eurocentric knowledge and the articulation of a “pensamiento propio latinoamericano.”

For Costa, a reevaluation of feminist history is the first step in a decolonial praxis: “the telling of other stories is undoubtedly one of the most important decolonial practices (…) knowing the past is a crucial part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization.”

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Tuhiwai Smith, in describing her work with Maoris, uses similar terminology to describe the decolonial project:

To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes.23

I agree with both Costa and Smith that we have to tell other stories and hold alternative histories as part of knowing and owning our own past. And though corrective readings and new feminist historiography are part of the process, let them not be the end, but part of the means of finding alternative ways of thinking and living. Of course fullness in representations of the past can never be reached; Hemmings’s strategy is therefore to “analyze not so much what other truer history we might write, but the politics that produce and sustain one version of history as more true than another, despite the fact that we know that history is more complicated than the stories we tell about it.”24 Hemmings is very clear that her work is on how dominant Western feminist stories have been cemented through narrative strategies of progress, loss or return, (and I would also add, a politics of exclusion). My project explores differentially non-dominant stories, and I have come to the conclusion that although we can perhaps borrow some strategies from Hemmings - namely that it’s important how we tell our stories - we have to re-conceive how we think of feminist theory and how it evolves to see where we’ve been so that we can engender a politics of inclusion.

23 Ibid. 96.
24 Hemmings, 15-16.
Decolonial feminism becomes an indispensable apparatus in reading the *filo de Clarice* in order to avoid, as Naomi Lindstrom and Renata Mautner Wasserman caution, a misapplication of feminist thought as elaborated largely in French-English and German-language literary cultures to literatures outside of Western Europe and the United States. This does not mean that we cannot read non-Western literatures *with* Western theory; it means we must be vigilant about the contexts of power in play, about the very applicability of Western theories to non-Western literatures. It is not my intention to apply Italian feminist theory to Lispector’s Brazilian literature. Instead, I see the Italian feminist readings of Lispector as an opportunity to tell a multiplicity of stories through points of contact, which includes but is not limited to an evaluation of the Italian feminist reception. Hence, I propose to read the European readings of Lispector decolonially, but what does that entail practically? Providing information about Clarice Lispector and Brazilian/Latin American feminisms and feminists, examining issues of translation and circulation, and a strategy of “interrupting” the Italian readings with close readings of Lispector’s texts are my strategies. Simultaneously, I will also be telling a story about a genealogy of Italian feminist sexual difference theory and practices, which has been maligned as essentialist and marginalized from the Western canon, but in light of new materialist feminism, merits reevaluation. Material feminism connects us back to decolonial feminism through the importance placed on the body. Bodies are points of contact. Points of contact form relational, living, moving, relationships.

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While the European readings of Lispector are in many ways problematic from a decolonial feminist standpoint as I will show in detail in the chapters that follow, by reading them and telling their stories I can become their ally and together we can become, as Lugones suggests, resisters to the coloniality of gender:

What I am proposing in working toward a decolonial feminism is to learn about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference, without necessarily being an insider to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to the coloniality arises. That is, the decolonial feminist’s task begins by her seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting her epistemological habit of erasing it. Seeing it, she sees the world anew, and then she requires herself to drop her enchantment with “woman,” the universal, and begins to learn about other resisters at the colonial difference.26

I believe that if we can become resisters together, then Italian sexual difference theory (itself a material feminism) may have significant overlap with the decolonial project. But before moving on, there is one more element to consider: the line between theory and fiction is blurred in Lispector’s most read genre-bending novel The Passion According to G.H.. It can be read as theory, or, theory-in-practice, as an onto-epistemological process itself. The Passion According to G.H. remains until this day on the short list of libri preziosi of the Libreria delle Donne di Milano, described as: “libro visionario ed iniziatico alla condizione umana femminile.”27 Lispector’s fiction is thus read as a ritual or process of philosophical initiation, as if it were a how to manual. In other words, as a source of knowledge based on the experience of a woman trying - and “failing” - to use phallogocentric language to convey her experience of being. Cixous, Muraro, Cavarero, and Braidotti undergo their own rituals of depersonalization as they read Lispector, coming to awareness of sexual difference and the need for new female

26 María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” Hypatia, vol 25. no.4 (Fall 2010), 753.
subjectivities. Each thinker then experiments with how to overcome the failure of language; as I will show, each in her own way, reaches the same conclusion, one that was in Lisptecor’s text all along: relationally. What does it mean that Clarice Lispector is foundational in Italian feminist thinking? What, then, does Brazilian fiction-as-theory, as onto-epistemology, mean in terms of the coloniality of power? *The Passion According to G.H.*, with its fusion of the human and non-human, seems to be uniquely subversive of the coloniality of power…

Hence, in offering this experimental symbiotic space to Italian feminist theory’s recent history and its contact(s) with Brazilian fiction in order to explore possibilities for alliances as resisters, we must also have an understanding of the issues surrounding translation, citation, and contexts of power. As Brazilian theorist Claudia de Lima Costa notes in *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Américas*:

> By what means and through which institutionalities do feminist concepts/discourses/practices gain temporary (or even permanent) residence in different representational economies? It is well known that texts do not travel across linguistic contexts without a “visa” (translations always entail some sort of cost). Their dislocation can only take place if there is also a material apparatus organizing their translation, publication, circulation, and reception. (...) Acts of reading (modes of reception) are acts of appropriation carried out in contexts of power (institutional, economic, political, and cultural).

Fiction and theory in translation travel (or do not travel) according to varying degrees of legibility and citability due to language, both the original language as well as the translation. How does the hegemony of English language affect my project? There is still the need to

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28 The passages they each choose and stress from Lispector offers clues as well. And for Lispector, after her own passion of *The Passion According to G.H.*, after the failure of words, comes her great experiment: *Água viva*, living, moving….

fundamentally improve the conditions of travel for feminist ideas and texts to circulate and interact more globally. I will be exploring and evaluating these issues through the *material apparatus* involved in the Lispector citations.\textsuperscript{30}

With the above in mind, this project attempts to revisit histories of women and texts - French, Italian and Brazilian - that are multiply and differentially marginalized in the current Western feminist narrative framework - in order to create sources of alternative knowledge and create an opportunity for something new to emerge symbio-creatively from these points of contact. Chapter One covers the genesis of European feminist approaches to Lispector’s *oeuvre* in France, where the first translations of her work appeared in 1954. The 1978 translation and publication of *The Passion According to G.H.* by *Editions des femmes* leads to the impassioned reading by Hélène Cixous of Lispector’s work, a reading and citation practice that will extend over the course of her career and help bring international attention to the Brazilian author. Yet in the current discourse, the story ends at Cixous and her (to some) inappropriately appropriative readings of Lispector. Cixous becomes the stand in for “feminist readings of Lispector,” often quoted and credited (and taken for granted) for bringing deserved attention to the Brazilian author, yet when one checks the footnotes, no names are typically given beyond Cixous, if hers at all. Within Chapter One I will also be providing vital counter-memory, decolonial feminist stories on Brazilian and Latin American feminisms, which have been left out of the dominant Anglo-American/Western feminist historical narrative or erroneously considered “lagging.”

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 25. Material apparatus refers to the translation, publication circulation and reception of texts.
I follow the material history linearly, according to publication dates, from France to its next scene, Italy, and trace the translation, publication, circulation and reception of Clarice Lispector in Italy, including carefully naming and locating the “phantom” players involved in Lispector’s arrival and impact.\(^{31}\) Hence, Chapter Two will focus on the arrival in Italy of Lispector’s texts, Luisa Muraro and the Diotima women’s feminist philosophy group’s readings. Chapter Three then covers Adriana Cavarero, as well as her split from said Diotima group. Finally, Chapter Four brings us to Rosi Braidotti, from her early texts on Lispector to present theoretical horizons. My concluding discussion will stem from the idea of connections as posited by Sonia Alvarez: “a translocal feminist politics of translation is crucial to the decolonial turn and a key strategy in building ‘connectant epistemologies’ in order to confront the equivocations or mistranslations that hinder feminist alliances, even among women who share the same language and culture.”\(^{32}\) I will expand on my theory of points of contact and explore possibilities of symbiosis and non-deterministic evolution as a theoretical tool.

Karen Barad expands her definition of apparatus to include us as subjects: “we are a part of that nature that we seek to understand.”\(^{33}\) So before we pull the filo di Clarice, who am I as an “apparatus” and how do I affect this story? What is at stake for me, personally, in this project? Or as Spivak puts it, “Why do I want to tell this story, and in telling it, what kind of subject do I

\(^{31}\) Further work on feminist readings of Lispector from other parts of Europe remains to be done. Portugal would be especially interesting I think.


\(^{33}\) Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 26.
become?”

Over the course of following the path Lispector in the work of Hélène Cixous, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rosi Braidotti, I have also been on a personal journey of understanding and situating my self as a subject and thinker. I mention early on that I am Brazilian and that is why the Lispector connection jumped out at me as particularly intriguing, but that is not the whole picture: I am Brazilian-American, a dual citizen, a duality that has accompanied me my entire life. But although I am a citizen of two countries and have grown up in both, I am never quite at home in either: in the United States I am foreign as soon as I pronounce my name Mariana - but “I don’t look Brazilian” because I am white, a sort of Latina but not one (Brazilians speak Portuguese, not Spanish, hence are not Hispanic), a “foreign American” without an accent; in Brazil I am a privileged white, a kind of gringa because I have American citizenship which affords me not just power but also the opportunity to come and go as I please to the desirable North. My entire life I have constantly had to translate myself to others and back to myself again, consistently answering why I left Brazil and/or the United States, or my favorite, which country do I prefer? I have moved often across continents and oceans, my life a strange, perpetual dance of being&longing, (be)longing, being-in-longing, longing-to-be.

In light of this reality, my originally [framed] project sat stalled, and proceeded in fits and starts, uncomfortably, because I could not find a way into, to speak about the connection I had found. I knew it was of value, but I needed to position myself and find my voice. I found it when I read Translocalities/Translocalidades, an anthology by a cross-disciplinary, cross-border research group of Latina and Latin American(ist) feminists, including Brazilians Claudia de

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Lima Costa and Sonia Alvarez, who identify themselves with the term “Translocas.” In the introduction, “Enacting a Translocal Feminist Politics of Translation,” Alvarez describes the Latin/a Américas as a translocal space and Latina/os as “translocal subjects,” hence:

…our politics and theorizing seek to interrupt “the hegemonic drone of economic neoliberalism,” heteronormative patriarchal racisms, and racist sexisms across the Latin/a Américas. We deploy the metaphor Translocas to capture both the movements of bodies, texts, capital, and theories in between North/South and to reflect the mobile epistemologies they inspire in growing numbers of subjects in contemporary times. (…) We embrace the transgressive, queer, transgendered sense of the term as well.35

Furthermore, Translocas in the Américas and beyond “defy ‘the us and them paradigm that stems from modernist/(colonial) modes of description and representation’ because we are simultaneously and intermittently self and other, if you will.” A Transloca’s “travels and translations efforts are also driven by affect, passion, solidarity, and interpersonal and political connectedness. What’s more, we travel across multiple worlds within ourselves.”36 Hence, at the core of my project lies my becoming Transloca.

These pages have been written in New York City, Rio de Janeiro, Vienna, San Francisco and beyond. But even without my actual privilege (and relative ease) of traveling the globe, it is through translation as “world traveling,” as constant mediation between worlds, that feminists like myself on both sides of the hemisphere are able to develop, heeding Shohat’s call, “critical multiaxis cartographies of knowledge in webs of relationality — and not in cauldrons of cannibalism (where difference of the other is ultimately assimilated into the sameness of the self) — as a first and necessary step toward social transformation.”37 We can stop trying to frame the

35 Alvarez et al. 3-4.
36 Ibid 4.
37 Ibid. 33.
world; it is not flat, it is not still. It is vibrantly, complexly, multi-dimensionally, relationally round, with agential forces circulating, relating. I invite you to travel with me and make points of contact.

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INTRODUCTION PART II:

POINTS OF CLARICE

I write in acrobatics and pirouettes in the air —

I write because I so deeply want to speak.

—Clarice Lispector, Água viva

Before we can discuss any European readings of her work, who was Clarice Lispector? In a 1942 letter to her best friend and fellow writer Lúcio Cardoso, a young Lispector writes:

Encontrei uma turma de colegas da Faculdade em excursão universitária. Meu exílio se tornará mais suave, espero. Sabe, Lúcio, toda a efervescência que eu causei só veio me dar uma vontade enorme de provar a mim e aos outros que eu sou mais do que uma mulher. Eu sei que voce não o crê. Mas eu também não o acreditava, julgando o q. tenho feito até hoje. É que eu não sou senão em estado potencial, sentindo que há em mim água fresca, mas sem descobrir onde é a sua fonte.


(I ran into a group of classmates from college on an university excursion. My exile will be milder, I hope. You know, Lúcio, all of the excitement I have caused really makes me want to prove to myself and to others that I am more than a woman. I know you don’t believe it. But I also didn’t believe it, judging by what I have done until now. It’s that I do not exist but in a state of potential, sensing there is fresh water within me, but not knowing its source

Okay, enough nonsense. This is all very funny. Only I never expected to laugh at life. As a proper Slavic girl, I was a serious young woman, ready to cry for mankind… (I am laughing).)\textsuperscript{39}

This short passage is a microcosm of the Lispector universe: extraordinarily dense and layered, with its own peculiar, colloquial-hermetic expression (and a hint of humor). It reveals much about the budding author, as well as foreshadows themes that will develop along the arc of her \textit{ouevre}. We see Clarice Lispector already concerned at the very start of her career with proving herself beyond the expectations and limits imposed upon her at the time by her gender and background. She was in fact among the first female law graduates in Brazil, and over the course of her career worked as a writer, translator, and journalist. Lispector’s statement that she wishes to prove herself “more than a woman” is, however, one of the only clear and direct known statements of any “feminist” agenda on her part; in general, Lispector resisted any political labels, including feminist, and shrouded herself in an air of mystery, but as her biographer Benjamin Moser points out in an interview:

She was most definitely a feminist. She was one of the very first women law graduates in the country. She was one of the very first female journalists. She was Brazil’s first great woman writer and a great deal of her work centers on women and women’s lives. But I think that her feminism came more from a general belief in the dignity and equality of all people — powerfully engrained, and based on the early experience of seeing her family destroyed by racism — than to the kind of political feminism that one sees in writers who were her contemporaries. (I’m thinking of people like Simone de Beauvoir).\textsuperscript{40}

Whether she called herself a feminist or not, her actions and her writing point to Lispector’s desire to express the core of \textit{her} experience. As she says in her novel \textit{Água viva}: “I write because

\textsuperscript{39} Translation mine. From Clarice Lispector Archive at Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa in Rio de Janeiro.

\textsuperscript{40} Benjamin Moser, interview, http://quarterlyconversation.com/the-clarice-lispector-roundtable
I so deeply want to speak.” To write as a woman during Lispector’s time was anything but simple; her deep desire to speak is that felt by so many women and others who historically have had no voice. It is why so many, myself included, feel drawn to her onto-epistemological work: because it helps them speak.

In the above letter, Lispector describes her state of being, using the oddly beautiful, anarchic syntax that will become a trademark of her fiction. Lispector’s syntax and punctuation are notoriously difficult to translate, in this case particularly to English. The Portuguese verbs ser and estar are both translated as “to be.” The verb ser is used for conditions or characteristics that are permanent, that describe the essence of something; the verb estar is used for transitory conditions or characteristics, “I am tall” versus “I am sick.” The “correct” phrasing in the above passage would be “eu nao estou senao em estado potencial;” to use sou instead is quite jarring, as physical or mental states are usually described with estar. Yet this is an extraordinary early example of how Lispector manipulated Brazilian Portuguese to convey the ineffable-ness of her experience, her condition, her self; as a creative, as a woman, as a creative woman. She was and remained in a state of potential, ever searching for that spring of inspiration within, continually pouring it forth to others. Potential embodied, Clarice Lispector was permanently becoming.

Yet Lispector never took herself too seriously, even when she was delving into such philosophical intricacies, even after she became renowned. Still, today her notoriety outside of Brazil typically ends around “greatest Brazilian woman writer of the 20th century.” Lispector’s life story does not, in fact, begin in Brazil. We must travel briefly to Chechelnik, in what is today the southwestern part of Ukraine but at the time had been part of the Russian Empire, where

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41 She also used punctuation creatively: one of her novels, Uma aprendizagem ou O livro dos prazeres, opens with a comma, and ends with a colon; A paixão segundo G.H. opens and closes with 6 dashes.
Clarice Lispector was born Chaya Lispector on December 10th, 1920.\textsuperscript{42} The youngest of three daughters of Pinkhas and Mania Lispector (néé Krimgold), Chaya was born en route to Brazil as the young Jewish family escaped the brutal interwar pogroms of Eastern Europe. Upon arrival in Maceió, Alagoas, in Northeastern Brazil, all except sister Tania changed their names, hence Chaya became Clarice, Pinkhas became Pedro, Mania became Marieta, and Leia became Elisa. Brazil was to be Clarice and her family’s permanent home, and unlike her older sisters, the only one Clarice knew growing up.\textsuperscript{43} The Lispector family spent most of Clarice’s impoverished childhood in the city of Recife. Her mother passed away when Clarice was only 10 years old, after which the family moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1935, then still the capital of Brazil. Upon marrying fellow law school student and diplomat Maury Gurgel Valente in 1943 (the year she was officially naturalized a citizen), Lispector lived abroad in Europe (Naples, Bern, Torquay) and Washington D.C. until the end of her marriage in 1959, when she returned to Rio for good with her two sons, Paulo and Pedro. Her life was tragically cut short by ovarian cancer the day before her 57th birthday in 1977.\textsuperscript{44} From her nomadic life, it could perhaps be argued that Lispector too is a \textit{Transloca} figure.

Over the course of her lifetime Clarice Lispector tried to obfuscate her origins, giving very little away; she was Brazilian, and “that is that,” she declared.\textsuperscript{45} Although Lispector never

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\textsuperscript{42} Chaya means life in Hebrew, a meaning chosen for a baby conceived in the hopes of restoring life to her mother. As recounted in Benjamin Moser’s biography, Lispector’s mother contracted syphilis after being raped by soldiers in a pogrom; at the time, it was believed that a pregnancy could cure a woman, hence the conception of Chaya, Clarice.

\textsuperscript{43} See the novel by Clarice’s sister Elisa, which recounts her family’s fraught story. Elisa Lispector, \textit{No exílio}, (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1948).

\textsuperscript{44} See the wonderful biography of Clarice Lispector by Benjamin Moser, \textit{Why This World},(New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2009).

\textsuperscript{45} Benjamin Moser, \textit{Why This World}. 
hid her Jewish heritage, she did not make much mention of it, or any details of her private life in general. In the above letter to Cardoso, a private letter to a friend, she mentions only playfully that she was Slavic. When asked about Russia, she once remarked: “I literally never set foot there: I was carried. But I remember one evening, in Poland, at the home of one of the secretaries of the embassy, I went out onto the terrace alone: a great black forest movingly pointed me the way to the Ukraine. I felt the call. Russia had me too. But I belong to Brazil.”

Poland was as far as Lispector ever came to visiting the place of her birth. Nadia Gotlib, author of Clarice, Uma vida que se conta, recounts that during said 1962 visit to Poland, Lispector was actually invited to visit the then Soviet Union, but she refused. She seems to have wanted to maintain the story that she literally never set foot in Russia, in an attempt to stave off the accusation of foreigner, which irked her. As Renata Wasserman notes, “the question that arises insistently in her biography and in her self-presentation is that of her status as a Brazilian and as a representative of Brazil: she calls attention, adamantly, as she claims Brazilianness, to a certain foreignness that shadows her.”

One of the main reasons for Clarice Lispector’s perceived foreignness was in fact a speech defect that mixed with the remnants of a Northeastern accent was quite strange and

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unique. As Benjamin Moser recounts in his magisterial biography of Lispector, Why This World:

Though she had arrived in earliest infancy, Clarice Lispector always struck many Brazilians as foreign, not because of her European birth or the many years she spent abroad, but because of the way she spoke. She lisped, and her rasping, throaty r’s gave her an odd accent. “I am not French,” she explained, which is how she sounded. “This r of mine is a speech defect: I simply have a tongue-tie. Now that my Brazilianness has been cleared up…”

Lispector insisted on her Brazilianness, which was also questioned due to her strange last name — referred to as “unpleasant” and “likely a pseudonym” in early reviews of her first, prized 1943 novel Perto do coração selvagem — as well as a certain personal oddness, heightened by her unusual accent. As is recounted by Moser and others, she did not want to undo the tongue tie because she heard it was a painful procedure, nor did she want to “fix” her accent through speech therapy, as she considered her speech part of her identity (elsewhere, in a typical move, she also claims she was too lazy).

Lispector would be happy to know that her legacy is firmly Brazilian/Jewish-Brazilian, thanks to her extra-ordinary, innovative manipulations of the Portuguese language, which truly set her apart. The poet Lêdo Ivo aptly captured the paradox:

There will probably never be a tangible and acceptable explanation for the language and style of Clarice Lispector. The foreignness of her prose is one of the most overwhelming facts of our literary history, and, even, of the history of our language. This


50 Moser, 7. Lispector recounts her arrival in Brazil as “when I was only two months old,” although it was known that she was over a year old.

51 Moser, 7-8. Again, anyone interested in Lispector must see her “live.” See footnote 49.

borderland prose, of immigrants and emigrants, has nothing to do with any of our illustrious predecessors… You could say that she, a naturalized Brazilian, naturalized a language.\(^{53}\)

One wonders why is it that Clarice Lispector’s innovative use of Brazilian Portuguese is considered so odd as to call into question her nationality. I am reminded of Virginia Woolf, whose manipulations of the English language are often attributed to mental illness, or her sexuality. Though an author’s background can certainly be plumbed for clues into their writing, both cases smack of misogyny. Lispector’s writing is often likened to Woolf’s, though Lispector claims to not have read Woolf or Joyce until later in life.\(^{54}\) The accident of her birth seems to imply, according to Castillo, that no Brazilian, no native speaker “would have arrived at Lispector’s markedly original deformations of Portuguese syntax. She is not, say the critics, typically Brazilian: ‘No one writes like Clarice Lispector. And she doesn’t write like anyone.’”\(^{55}\) Yet in a vast, melting pot nation of indigenous peoples, people of African descent, European and Asian immigrants such as Brazil, who is typically Brazilian?

Lêdo’s Ivo assertion that Lispector naturalized a language is on point in that she helped reshape written Brazilian Portuguese. As Wasserman also puts so well, Lispector was “imperfectly inserted in her national literature and impossible to imagine outside of it.”\(^{56}\) The fact is that Clarice Lispector loved the Portuguese language in its Brazilian form and felt that she


\(^{54}\) The title of her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, is taken from Joyce, however it was Lispector’s friend Lúcio Cardoso who suggested it, the young writer had not yet read *Ulysses*. Lispector mentions in the 1977 live interview that she read erratically and in a “mixed-up” fashion as a youth, reading everything from *folhetim* to Dostoyevsky and Hesse.


\(^{56}\) Wasserman, 107.
had to legitimize her Brazilianness, cement it, in order to be free to work the language in bold new ways. This may also be partially due to the cultural legacy of the Brazilian Modernist Movement and its famous *Manifesto Antropófago* (*Cannibalist Manifesto*, 1928), which pushed for the creation of a national literature, treating national topics. An example is Lispector’s contemporary João Guimarães Rosa’s 1956 *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, a long tome (his only novel) written in an intensely colloquial and inventive Northeastern dialect that is practically impenetrable at times. Guimarães Rosa and Lispector are often quoted/grouped together as having forever changed the landscape of Brazilian literature through their experimental use of language, though Guimarães Rosa’s novel is usually heralded as *the* great Brazilian novel, the Brazilian *Ulysses*. Guimarães Rosa, Brazilian born and bred, was himself intensely interested in foreign languages and learned many. A doctor by training, he eventually became a diplomat, as well as author:

I speak: Portuguese, German, French, English, Spanish, Italian, Esperanto, some Russian; I read: Swedish, Dutch, Latin and Greek (but with the dictionary right next to me); I understand some German dialects; I studied the grammar of: Hungarian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Lithuanian, Polish, Tupi, Hebrew, Japanese, Czech, Finnish, Danish; I dabbled in others. BUT, ALL POORLY. And I think that studying the spirit and the mechanism of other languages helps greatly to more deeply understand one’s national language. In general, however, I studied for pleasure, desire, distraction.

Unlike Lispector, uber-polyglot Guimarães Rosa did not have to worry about an accusation of being a foreigner; to the contrary, his great novel was written in regional language and was hence hyper Brazilian.

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57 Lispector and Guimarães Rosa are kind of Brazil’s Woolf and Joyce.

Clarice Lispector self-described herself “shy but also audacious.”

She declared her love for the Portuguese language and described her craft in an essay, “Declaração de amor,” (“Declaration of Love,”), openly defying her “illustrious predecessors” and blasting the notion of a static language:

This is a confession of love: I love the Portuguese language. It is not an easy one. It is not malleable. And, as it has not been profoundly worked upon by thought, its tendency is to not be subtle and to at times react with a swift kick to those who fearfully dare to transform it into a language of feeling and alertness. And of love. The Portuguese language is a true challenge for the writer. Above all for one who writes by removing the first layer of superficiality from things and people.

(...I like to handle it — as I liked being on a horse and guiding it by the reins, at times slowly, at times at a gallop.

I wanted the Portuguese language to reach its highest heights in my hands. And this is a desire every writer has. A Camões and others of his like were not enough to give us forever a completed linguistic inheritance. All of us who write are trying to make of the “tomb of thought” something that gives it life.

We have these difficulties. But I have not spoken of the enchantment of dealing with a language that has not been given depth. What I inherited is not enough for me.

If I were mute and also could not write, and they asked me to which language I would like to belong, I would say: English, which is precise and beautiful. But as I was not born mute and could write, it became absolutely clear to me that what I really wanted was to write in Portuguese. I even wish that I had not learned other languages: just so that my approach to Portuguese were virgin and unclouded.

I include this passage, which has not been previously translated into English, to paint a picture of Lispector as an artist and person before we delve into her actual work in the chapters that follow.

As Lispector herself declares, all writers want to take language to its maximum potential; it is not a question of whether one has a multilingual background, and it is not an attempt to create a new language. There can be no virgin approach by anyone to any language, or, in the words of Jacques Derrida, all use of language is idiosyncratic: “I do not believe in pure idioms. I think

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59 See her live interview. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohHP1l2EVnU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohHP1l2EVnU).

there is naturally a desire, for whoever speaks or writes, to sign in an idiomatic, irreplaceable manner.”

I want to circle back to that remarkable, irreplaceable sentence from Lispector’s letter to Lúcio Cardoso: “É que eu não sou senão em estado potencial, sentindo que há em mim água fresca, mas sem descobrir onde é a sua fonte,” (“It’s that I do not exist but in a state of potential, sensing there is fresh water within me, but without finding its source.”) Lispector’s description is of living as an embodied process of becoming, an onto-epistemology she will fully develop in her unclassifiable novel The Passion According to G.H., a text she wrote in one burst shortly after separating from her husband and moving back to Rio de Janeiro, in what seems to have been a watershed moment in her life and writing:


For Clarice Lispector, as she says in the only live recording of her available, not writing meant she was dead, “quando não escrevo estou morta.” Writing was Lispector’s life, her life source, her connection to being which she kept trying to capture with language, from the letter to Cardoso to Água viva: “I, who want the most primary thing because it’s the source of generation—I who long to drink water at the source of the spring—I who am all of this, must by fate and tragic destiny only know and taste the echoes of me, because I cannot capture the me itself.”62

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61 Clarice Lispector, interview, “‘Já tentei reformar o mundo. Mas quem sou eu, meu Deus, para mudar as coisas?’”, por Edilberto Coutinho. O Globo, Rio de Janeiro, 29.04.76

The reason her writing is so captivating to thinkers of sexual difference is that even when she cannot capture with words the “me,” the source of life that is within, it is there—within a body, her body: “And there’s a physical bliss to which nothing else compares. The body is transformed into a gift. And you feel that it’s a gift because you experience, right at the source, the suddenly indubitable present of existing miraculously and materially.”

63 Ibid. 80.
CHAPTER ONE:

ENCOUNTERS IN FRANCE AND LATIN AMERICA

And Encounters happen:
there is a room there with, inside, a cockroach.
And Clarice enters, by means of the cockroach,
her passion according to—the Living.
—Hélène Cixous

From Brazil we follow the travel of the material apparatus of Clarice Lispector’s fiction
to France, where the first full (and scandalously bad, according to the author herself) translation
of Lispector’s work in Europe appeared in 1954. It was not until the late 1970’s, however, that
Lispector’s fiction began to gain notoriety due to the rise of the feminist movement; in particular,
two figures stand out: Antoinette Fouque, head of Éditions des femmes, and Hélène Cixous.
Cixous is undeniably responsible for drawing much deserved international attention to Clarice
Lispector’s body of work, which is in and of itself the result of consistent and fervent citation

64 Hélène Cixous, “Clarice Lispector: The Approach, Letting Oneself (be) Read (by) Clarice Lispector,
The Passion According to C.L.,” in Coming to Writing and Other Essays, (Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 1991) 70.

65 Maria Marta Laus Pereira, “Aspectos da recepção de Clarice Lispector na Franca,” (Anuário de
Literatura 3, 1995, 110). Lispector was herself living in Washington D.C., at the time.
practices on her part. She can be credited with the first major feminist reading of Lispector’s fiction with her essay “L’approche de Clarice Lispector” (1979). However, since then the constant citation of Cixous along with Lispector has created a quasi-fusion of the two authors, leading to Lispector’s association with a monolithic “French feminist theory,” which has itself been characterized as “the Other main current” in the Anglo-American dominated Western feminist history narrative. As Hemmings points out, “this story has rightly been critiqued as an Anglo-American trajectory within Western feminist thought, one that forces European or non-Western feminist theorists either to reposition themselves in line with the former’s logic, or to depict themselves as critical or transcendent, but nevertheless as responsive.” Furthermore, other figures are sidelined who in fact played critical roles in the material apparatus of Lispector’s fiction's arrival and circulation in France and by extension the world. Thus, my purpose in this chapter is to use my Transloca lens to approach Cixous's writings on Lispector decolonially, acknowledging the importance of the connection but also releasing the fusion so the specificity of each author can be seen once more.

The web of citation practices surrounding the Cixous-Lispector connection is tangled and requires careful handling so as not to cut away important knots. One such knot is Cixous herself: Cixous is a fascinating, paradoxical figure, as she is part of the canon on one hand —a major name in France and international feminist thinking, she is definitely part of the story— but on the other hand she has been pigeonholed and cemented in time. Indeed, as undergraduates in the

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67 See Anna Klobucka’s article “Hélène Cixous and the Hour of Clarice Lispector.”

United States we read her landmark 1975 essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” and then we “move on,” literally and figuratively. Hemmings suggests a method to counteract this very type of pigeonholing of key feminist figures:

…a feminist alternative to changing the historical record here is a process of revaluing currently sidelined traces of already key rather than marginal feminist figures. In doing so I hope this work might have two primary effects: firstly to highlight the restricted nature of what we already think we know about those figures and their histories; and secondly, to suggest a way of imagining the feminist past somewhat differently – as a series of ongoing contests and relationships rather than a process of imagined linear displacement.\(^{69}\)

If we consider Cixous’ own place in the Anglo-Western feminist cannon, she is most often associated with a now maligned *écriture feminine*, consequently her Lispector readings fall by the wayside into a *niche*. Therefore, this project itself functions as a citation practice and narration which renews our attention to this typically lesser known constellation of Cixous’ work. Cixous is far more than a mere philological way station in telling the *filo di Clarice* story - if I treated her as such or left her out of the story entirely, I would be propagating the very exclusion my project hopes to counteract.

I disagree with Hemmings, however, in that I also believe the marginal feminist figures *must* be cited, thus in the coming paragraphs I will be naming them. Because in the end, a citation practice is itself not only a narrative but also an affirmation of a web of interrelatedness, of complex, living relationships. My decolonial feminist citation practice will include the story of Clélia Pisa, ex-pat Brazilian living in Paris largely responsible for Lispector’s publication at Des Femmes, as well as her connection to Latin American women’s groups in Paris and beyond. I will show how women’s movements were flourishing in Brazil and Latin America at the same

\(^{69}\) Hemmings, 131-132.
time as Europe and North America, dispelling the myths that Latin American feminisms are somehow missing or behind.

Norma Klahn proposes in her chapter of *Translocalities/Translocalidades* that “to better understand the ‘coloniality of power’ one must ‘comprehend the unequal traveling and translation of feminist practices, theories, and texts and their reception.’” In the case of Lispector and Cixous, fiction travels much more easily than theory - Lispector’s fiction is published in France well before Cixous’ theory is published in Brazil. However, Cixous is known in Brazil while Brazilian theorists remain in the shadows. How is Cixous situated? Betty Milan’s book of interviews, *A força da palavra*, contains two interviews with Cixous originally published in the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* in 1982 and 1993. How Milan situates Cixous sheds some light on the imbalance of power in the flow of theory transnationally:

Born in 1937 in the city of Oran, Algeria, Hélène Cixous discovered France in 1955, when her parents were expelled from Algeria due to antisemitic persecution. In that year, Cixous adopted an imaginary nationality - which is, in fact, that of many writers - a literary nationality. A specialist in Joyce and English literature, Hélène Cixous was friends with Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), as well as Jacque Derrida (1930-2004). She played a decisive role in the formation of the University of Vincennes, where she founded the Center for Research in Feminine Studies - Europe’s first - and is considered one of the mothers of poststructuralist feminist theory. Her literary oeuvre is vast: poetry, fiction, theater, essay. With the essay *L’heure de Clarice Lispector* (“A hora de Clarice Lispector”) she disseminated the Brazilian author’s work in France and in 1989 was awarded the “Ordem do Cruzeiro Sul” by Brazil for her contribution to the diffusion of our literature.71

Cixous is known the world over as French or French-Algerian, however, she is actually the daughter of a German Jewish mother who fled Hitler to Algeria in 1933, and a Sephardic Jewish-

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Algerian father, whose family still spoke Spanish at home. Growing up, Cixous heard Arabic and Hebrew until her father’s untimely death, as well as German, English and French.72

Cixous is quoted in Susan Suleiman’s introduction to *Coming to Writing* as describing herself as: “People said, ‘the French,’ and I never thought I was French . . . I felt that I was neither from France nor from Algeria. And in fact, I was from neither.”73 Her adolescent experience of Algerian Jewishness made her realize that the logic of nationality was usually accompanied by such “unbearable behaviors” as colonialism and antisemitism. It also made her think of herself and her family in the provocative terms of a multiple alterity constituted by the logic of nationality, but which also undermines it with a form of speech seeking moral and political precision rather than authority: “How could I be from a France that colonized an Algerian country when I knew that we ourselves, German Czechoslovak Hungarian Jews, were other Arabs.”74 At 18 years old Cixous moved to France and began writing: “At a certain moment for the person who has lost everything, whether that means a being or a country, language becomes the country. One enters the country of words.”75 It was in 1977 that she met Antoinette Fouque, founder of both the Women’s Liberation Movement in France in 1968 and the feminist publishing house *Des femmes* in 1973. It was through her that Cixous entered the scenes of the feminist movement and women’s history, and decided to “redefine herself morally and politically as a ‘Jewoman,’ (juifemme) — her own neologism that visibly doubles and splits

72 Susan Suleiman, “Writing Past the Wall,” in Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing*. xix.

73 Ibid. xix.


75 Susan Suleiman, “Writing Past the Wall,” in Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, xx.
her cultural legacy and position as subject along an ethnic-sexual axis. By political choice, she would publish all of her books with *Des femmes.*” It was also at *Des femmes* that Cixous would “meet” Clarice Lispector. It is understandable how *personal* the connection and affinity with Lispector felt for Cixous.

Milan uses a phrase to frame her interview with Cixous which is telling about the the coloniality of power and its impact on sources of knowledge: “to know a little bit more about Lispector, I went to listen to Hélène Cixous, who gave me an interview in her apartment in Paris.” As I quoted in the introduction, Costa reminds us that “theory” continues to stand under the sign of the West, which in turn remains the archival source of information on non-Western locations. The fact that Milan uses such language from/in Brazil is a sign of how needed the decolonial project is - how we must revisit the sites of our own history under Western eyes and rewrite them, to tell our stories ourselves. Though the Milan interview with Cixous seeks to celebrate Cixous’ role in the transmission of Lispector in France, Milan displaces the source of knowledge to France, to Cixous. Meanwhile, Cixous’ essays on Lispector - the very essays responsible for the amped-up circulation of Lispector’s work - will themselves only be published in Brazil in Portuguese in 1991 in a small journal, and more fully in 1999 as *A hora de Clarice*

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77 Milan.

78 Costa, 137.

79 Brazilian writings on Lispector are vast - including feminist readings.
Lisapector to mixed reception.\textsuperscript{80} The 1989 prize awarded Cixous by the Brazilian government preceded the publication of her work in Portuguese, which suggests, again, that fiction can travel more fluidly and freely than theory, especially feminist theory written by a woman.

Indeed, Brazilian feminist thinkers are as of yet still quite unknown on the world stage, which leads to erroneous assumptions about the state of feminism in Brazil and Latin America in general, an issue I will be discussing shortly. Furthermore, the prize awarded Cixous was not enough to situate her as an intellectual powerhouse in Brazil (only those who could read the original French had access to it before 1999).\textsuperscript{81} Milan situates her within a French male intellectual genealogy of Lacan and Derrida in order for Brazilian readers to locate her and give her weight and credibility, which can be interpreted both positively and negatively. As Claudia de Lima Costa describes, “who gets cited, where, and by whom — namely, the geoliniguistics of citations — exposes the routes through which theories travel, and the (masculine) intellectual lineages are constructed in a global context.”\textsuperscript{82} Milan does not cite Cixous’ fellow female intellectuals such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva — that female genealogy of thinkers is a much more recent phenomenon, the result of ongoing feminist citational practices.

When asked how she discovered Clarice Lispector, Cixous recounts how Antoinette Fouque of Éditions des femmes bought the rights to publish Lispector in France, and the ex-pat Brazilian translator Regina de Olivera Machado showed her a few pages of the forthcoming

\textsuperscript{80} Hélène Cixous, \textit{A hora de Clarice Lispector} (Rio de Janeiro: Exodus, 1999). In Maria Marta Laus Pereira, “Aspectos da recepção de Clarice Lispector na Franca,” there is mention of an earlier publication of an article by Cixous, “Aproximação de Clarice Lispector: deixar-se ler (por) Clarice Lispector — A paixão segundo C.L.,” tr. Pina Coco, \textit{Tempo Brasileiro} 104 (1991) 9-24. I have not found any mention this article anywhere else. Regardless, the publication is still much later in Brazil than in the original.

\textsuperscript{81} Cixous’s essay “Extreme Fidelité” was published in Brazil in French in \textit{Travessia} No. 14 (1987), 11-45.

\textsuperscript{82} Claudia de Lima Costa, 142.
publications. Cixous also mentions reading about Lispector in “an anthology of texts written by Brazilian women” that was published by *Des femmes* and what followed was in her words, a miracle:

I read a small fragment of *Água viva* and I was astonished, I thought it was sublime. I could not believe the miracle and I told myself that I would not believe, just like that, that a work existed with the quality of those pages. Then *The Passion According to G.H.* was published by *Éditions des femmes* and it was decisive. I admitted that she was, for me, the greatest contemporary writer. For a woman writer, Clarice Lispector is an initiation, she opened up a territory that I never imagined I would someday enter. To work on femininity and writing I had always used texts written by men in which femininity appeared. (…) Clarice saved me and gave me a universe.\(^{83}\)

Finding Lispector was clearly a watershed moment for Cixous; she has continuously written on Lispector until as recently as 2005.\(^{84}\) Her love of Lispector’s writings is unrestrained and contagious.

Antoinette Fouque, founder of the Women’s Liberation Movement in France as well as head of *Des femmes*, was also interviewed by Betty Milan, in 1987. In the interview she is asked by Milan, “was it *Éditions des femmes* that gave Clarice the importance that she has?” Again we see Milan herself displacing the source of power from Lispector’s writing to Fouque and her publishing house. Fouque answers accordingly by owning her position of power, “yes, after we published her, she was translated by American, British, and Italian publishers. We worked hard so that Clarice could be known worldwide. I even took her to Japan. (…) We will be publishing

\(^{83}\) Milan. Translation mine.

\(^{84}\) Cixous’ recent work is on writing and visual art, including a collaboration with visual artist Roni Horn, who created an installation based on Lispector’s *Água viva*. See Roni Horn, *Rings of Lispector (Agua Viva)* (Steidl: Hauser&Wirth, 2005).
her entire oeuvre.” Fouque’s response is revealing of the conditions of travel of women’s writing and how it took the rise of women’s movements and women led publishing houses to begin to push the publication of women locally and globally. Her response also highlights, however, the double displacement of Third World women writers. Fouque tried to meet Lispector personally, but they missed each other on both occasions; she calls the discovery of Lispector both unlikely and absolutely necessary. She adds, at the end of her interview, that Clarice “happened” at her publisher because of her love for Brazil, “minha paixão pelo Brasil.”

Neither Cixous nor Fouque credit the women who put together the “anthology of texts by Brazilian women” published by Des femmes: Maryvonne Lapouge and Brazilian ex-pat Clélia Pisa. I strive, in keeping with Gayatri Spivak and Claudia de Lima Costa, to remain “vigilant about citation and translation practices so as not to lose sight of feminisms political and epistemological project,” hence, the importance of the decolonial feminist counter-memory that follows. The story recounted by Clélia Pisa in 1987 in a Brazilian journal tells a different story of how Lispector was published in France. Pisa first recalls the very early translations of Lispector that did not receive much attention. Then, in 1974-1975, the (unnamed) publisher that was going to publish The Passion decided not to due to an increase in paper prices. Lapouge and Pisa travelled the same year to interview the Brazilian women writers that would be part of their anthology, including Lispector. During the interview, Lispector showed the letter she received from the French publisher and asked Pisa to help her, giving her permission to retrieve the

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85 Ibid. Translation mine. Fouque is also interviewed by Benjamin Moser, included in the appendix to his biography Why This World.

86 Pisa is also sometimes spelled Piza in some documents, due to changes in Brazilian Portuguese orthography depending on the time period, generating some confusion when researching her.

translated manuscript, which she did once the publisher gave a definitive no. A year passes, and
Pisa decides to bring the book to *Des femmes* (though she does not name any names of
publishers or publishing houses in her text), who decides to publish it immediately. She
characterizes her role humbly as that of Lispector’s “messenger.”

Pisa describes the scene in France as the peak years of the feminist movement: “A
França, então, estava no auge do movimento de libertação da mulher e no Brasil este era também
o ano inaugural de uma série de novas afirmações feministas.” Pisa is referring to the United
Nations designation of 1975 as International Women’s Year, with the first World Conference on
Women held in Mexico City, both of which became part of a larger program referred to as the
Decade of Women. Indeed, in Brazil 1975 was the year of the establishment of the first
feminist women’s journal *Brasil Mulher*, followed by *Nós Mulheres* in 1976, founded by the São
Paulo women’s association, and in Rio de Janeiro *Mulherio* in 1981. It is crucial to know that
contemporary feminist activism in Brazil emerged in a moment of political upheaval: the military
militância,” (“The gender of militancy”) that under the dictatorship, women participating in
resistance were doubly transgressive, and many paid the high price of prison, exile, torture and
even death. Garcia highlights the fact that the rise of feminism in Brazil followed from

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88 Pisa, 175.


91 Ana Alice Alcantara Costa and Cecilia Sardenberg, “Contemporary Feminisms in Brazil: Achievements, Challenges, and Tensions,” Revista Feminismos, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May-August 2014) 53. This is a wonderful review source and point of entry into Brazilian feminisms.

women’s dissatisfaction with experiences of “double militancy” within leftist revolutionary movements; women’s issues within leftist resistance were considered secondary and bourgeois.93

Around this same time period, a group was formed in Paris called Grupo Latino-Americano de Mulheres me Paris (1972-1976), made up of women from all over Latin America, many in exile, including Clélia Pisa herself. The group published a bilingual Spanish-Portuguese journal called Nosotras.94 Ex-militants such as Maria Inês Castilhos, returned from exile in France and published in Nós Mulheres, themselves vehicles of exchange of information and practices.95 Notably, Pisa’s essay is titled simply, “Depoimento,” which means “testimony,” a term that will become part of a broader feminist project of recuperating women’s testimonies from the dictatorship period throughout Latin America. Women’s testimonies have become crucial to forming a full account of life under different regimes and the particular violences suffered by women.96

Feminism in Brazil, as Sonia Alvarez notes, “like so many of the so-called new social movements that took shape in the region in the 1970’s and 1980’s, can today be more aptly be characterized as expansive, polycentric, heterogeneous discursive field of action which spans

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93 Ibid. 331. Garcia notes similar situations in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and less radically, Italy. In a footnote he mentions the Anni di Piombo and the crisis of the Lotta Continua group, as well as the feminist clashes within the Communist Party. He recommends Rossana Rossanda, *Anche per me- Donna, persona memoir dal 1973 al 1986*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1987).


into a vast array of cultural, social and political arenas.” 97 Beyond the era of dictatorships, in Brazil the 1990’s saw a dramatic proliferation of the spaces and places in which women call themselves feminists. After over two decades of struggle, Alvarez notes the presence of feminists “in a wide range of public arenas— from lesbian feminist collectives to research-funded NGO’s, from trade unions to Black and indigenous movements, from university women’s studies programs to mainstream political parties, the State apparatus and the international aid and development establishments.” 98 More broadly, the Encuentros, that is, Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters, began in 1981 have been held every 2-3 years in different countries. The Encuentros served a springboards for the development of a common Latin American Feminist political language and as staging grounds for often contentious political battles over what would constitute “the most efficacious strategies for achieving gender equality in dependent, capitalist, and patriarchal states.” 99 The meetings provided a unique space for activists to debate collectively the always-contested meanings and goals of feminism and its relationship to other struggles for rights and social justice in the region. Alvarez finds that “the Encuentros have played a critical role in fashioning common discourse, fostering a shared (though polysemic) Latin American feminist political grammar, and providing activists in individual countries with key theoretical and strategic insights and symbolic resources which they subsequently ‘translated’ and redeployed locally.” 100


98 Ibid.

99 Costa and Sardenberg, 61.

In her “Depoimento,” Clélia Pisa credits feminism as the catalyst for the publication and interest in Lispector’s novels, all of which were then published in France over the course of around 10 years, but credits Lispector’s writing itself for the sustained interest. Pisa then cites the critical role Cixous played in Lispector’s international transmission, mentioning her essays, books and seminars on Lispector, calling Cixous’s work the “fio de Ariana” that allowed Clarice Lispector to traverse the labyrinth of French letters. Finally, she notes that Lispector’s success in France was a phenomenon compared to other Brazilian authors, old and new. Pisa’s testimony was published in the journal Travessia as part of a special issue on Lispector’s work on the tenth anniversary of her death as an accompaniment to Cixous’ “Extrême Fidélité.” Oddly, Cixous is published in French, while all of the other pieces by French or American critics (Anna Klobucka, Earl Fitz) are translated into Portuguese. Pisa’s story provides a fascinating, little-known counter-memory to the Franco-centric versions of the arrival of Lispector in France, to which I have added information to decolonize (or inaugurate) knowledge about Brazilian and Latin American feminisms.

Pisa and Lapouge’s anthology Brasileiras: voix, écrits du Brésil (1977) includes interviews and excerpts by 26 Brazilian women writers, all translated into French, which is quite extraordinary. In the case of Lispector, the excerpt included is from Água viva, translated erroneously as Meduse. It is a unique publication, one which primed the French feminist scene for the arrival of Lispector and other Latin American women writers. Pisa and Lapouge sent a letter to Lispector in 1975 to ask her to be a part of the anthology, which is available, among

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101 Água viva can be literally translated as “jellyfish,” though that was not what Lispector intended.
many treasures, at the Clarice Lispector archive at the Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa in Rio de Janeiro. Of particular note in the letter are the following passages:

Nosso projeto propõe-se a apresentar, em livro a ser editado na França, depoimentos de escritoras brasileiras sobre o lugar que ocupam, ou que sentem que ocupam pelo fato, talvez, de serem mulheres. Queremos saber se para estas escritoras este aspecto se reflete no que fazem quando, por exemplo em romance ou conto, o tema se prepara, a situação dos personagens se delinea, o ritmo das frases se estabelece, se no que censuram de si mesmas ou ao contrário, no que expõem reflete-se a condição feminina de cada uma.

Pode ser que esta condição feminina não tenha sido objeto de reflexão. Gostaríamos então de saber porque. Se ao contraio ela o foi em que medida conta.

Interessam-nos também outos aspectos da produção literária: a publicação do manuscrito, o que ela significa, o contato com a editora com os problemas que se apresentam e enfim o encontro com o leitor.

Letters such as this are invaluable decolonial feminist artifacts; this particular letter, seemingly bland, actually reveals much about the states of both French and Brazilian feminist movements and is itself a point of contact. First, we gain important factual information about the history behind Lispector’s publication in France. Note the approach of Lapouge and Pisa in addressing Lispector, avoiding the word feminism and instead inquiring almost gently about what it meant to be a woman writer, including questions about the process and material apparatus of publication. Second, we see that efforts were being made, in 1975, by both Brazilian and French women, together, towards international publications and communication by women.

The anthology, itself another invaluable, collaborative, decolonial source of knowledge, opens with a brief, dense introduction by Pisa. She makes the case that the texts gathered not only reveal the experience of women’s lives, but also a lot about Brazil, with its extreme social inequality and injustices. She uses her introductory remarks as an opportunity to boldly reveal to
the French public the political situation in Brazil at the time. Pisa writes that the leaders of the country think the country is not ripe for a real political debate, which they use an an excuse for their claim to power; these leaders believe they do not have a “vocation for dictatorship,” it’s the country that needs it. They assert that there is a Congress and two national parties, but the reality is that the dictatorship requires certain behaviors from politicians, and dispose of an arsenal of measures to ensure a lack of political rights to politicians and private citizens alike. Pisa describes the regimes use of censorship, coercion, and torture. She wonders, “comment désigner ce système brésilien que ne veut pas être une dictature mais ne saurait être dit democratique? La definition imports peu. Seul compete le sentiment de la population.”

Pisa describes the situation in Brasil as one of oppression, alternating between relative calm and brutal repression, which caused a state of constant anxiety. The pretexts given for the 1964 military coup were to stop communism, strengthen ties with our “great North-American ally”, and restore the country financially, when the reality was to widen the gap between the “le peuple e la frange privilégié.”

Pisa then makes an astute observation about cultural influences and translation, which has in a way always been an issue in Brazil/Latin America due to colonialism; in Brazilian culture, the late 1920’s were particularly important, with the Semana de Arte Moderna and the 1928 Manifesto antropófago, which proposed devouring foreign influences:

Si aujourd’hui, après bientôt cinq cents ans d’histoire il s’est formé une entité nationale plus apte que par le passé à resister aux influx extérieurs, une fragilité demeure. Que faire, en effet, des idées, concepts, théories élaborés dans les secteurs favorisés des nations plus prestigieuses? Les ignorer purement et simplement serait, en


103 Ibid. 7.
quelque sorte, démériter. Les accepter sans discussion, méconnaître l’identité du pays où l’on vit. Les solutions adoptées sont toujours une affaire individuelle et le résultat, le plus souvent, d’un choix douloureux.  

We see how, in 1977 when the anthology is published, Brazilians are grappling with what we now call the coloniality of power: how to deal with outside influence? I would add now, in 2017, that it is an ongoing process. Pisa then extends the difficulty of travel and translation of theory to feminism in particular: she notes that in Brazil many critiques of feminism come from those who deride it as an “import,” which Pisa says is unfair considering the amount of all sorts of influences coming in and out of the country. She then brings up a second critique: those who say that in a poor country such as Brazil there are other, more pressing priorities and hence women must wait their turn in silence. Pisa herself notes that this is not a uniquely Brazilian situation — that of tension between the “lutte des classes et la lutte des sexes” — but how Brazilian women deal with this split will be their own original path to take.

Pisa is discussing the coloniality of gender avant-la-lettre, a practice also seen in the Group Latino Americano de Mulheres, of which she was a member. The group writes in its first issue of Nosotras:

Todo se pasó como si fuéramos una pelota de nieve: dos o tres latinoamericanas escribiendo sus tesis de doctorado sobre la mujer. Deparamonos por la primera vez con las preguntas porque piensan esto las femenistas francesas? que lo que quiere decir el feminismo? El feminismo es un movimiento que tendría sentido solamente en un país

104 Ibid. 7.

105 Prado notes in the Nós Mulheres journal in Brazil, little or no reference to any foreign feminist texts, even though several members of the publication had been exiled in France. In issue number 6, they extol “a luta pela emancipação feminina é, portanto, parte integrante da luta por uma sociedade mais justa e democratica.” This position was a response to conflicts among the left. Prado also tells of the Brazilian women exiled in Paris who were discouraged from joining the women’s groups, or left the Group Latino-Americano de Mulheres, due to coercion from resistance/left organizations. (Prado, 322.)

106 Ibid.
industrializado? Que hay de común o de distinto entre la mujer mexicana, venezolana, argentina, brasileña, francesa?\textsuperscript{107}

Hence, the theme of “Latin American specificity,” in other words, a nascent decolonial feminism, was present from the beginning, and was given as the reason why the group came to be; though they participated in meetings of French feminist groups such as the MLF, quickly the need for a separate Latin American group to address the specific issues they faced became evident. The group was against the “acritical” importing of ideas: “no podemos separar a la mujer de la realidad nacional en donde se encuentra.”\textsuperscript{108} The realities of Latin American women were diverse among themselves, hence the need for a non-homogenous idea of “us:” as it was not possible to separate these multiple identities, a strategy that included how to think about these multiple forms of oppression had to be articulated; their debates are present throughout the issues of \textit{Nosotras}. As Abreu notes, the group was tuned in to intersectionality before it became known through the work of Black American feminists.\textsuperscript{109} The group still believed in the foundational overlap of the women’s movement, and declared, “el movimiento feminista debe abarcar a las mujeres en su conjunto, porque no se podrá liberar a una parte de ellas sin liberarlas a todas.”\textsuperscript{110}

Returning to Pisa’s introduction, we see her move from gender to race and class, noting that the women of the anthology were almost all but two of upper classes, and with one exception, all white. She quotes Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre’s famous line describing gendered racial relations in colonial Brazil, “Preta para trabalhar, mulata para foder, e

\textsuperscript{107} Abreu, 555.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 557.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
branca para casar,” (“Black for work, mulata for sex, and white for marriage”), to make the point that although that line was from the past, it was still valid to describe the mentalities of the present: gendered racial discrimination alive and well in Brazil.\footnote{111} Pisa describes how, as long as Blacks stay poor, race is not an issue; it is when they try to climb the social ladder that they must “whiten.”\footnote{112} \textit{Branqueamento} or “whitening” was in fact part of national policy in Brazil in the late 19th/early 20th centuries, enacted to “dilute” the black race post-emancipation by bringing in over one million white European immigrants between 1890-1914.\footnote{113} We see how Pisa brings together gender, race and class relationally— the coloniality of gender exposed— her anthology a vehicle for decolonial feminism, before it was thus called.

Lapouge and Pisa’s interview with Lispector included in the anthology was held at her apartment in Copacabana. Lispector is typically evasive of her birthdate, and emphasizes her Brazilianness. She speaks of writing for writing’s sake, for the process or act of creation itself, as well as the impossibility of making a living as a woman writer: the publisher takes 90\% and she remains with only 10\%. She adds that she translates and writes columns for newspapers in order to make ends meet, though she does not enjoy doing so and cannot do so when writing. Much like her televised 1977 interview, in which Lispector says she does not feel well, again she mentions not feeling unwell and sad in this interview; perhaps it is her sickness, ovarian cancer, of which she was not yet aware, beginning to take its toll (she will pass away at the end of 1977).

Pisa and Lapouge sense that they may be upsetting the famous author, to which Lispector responds, “I do not lend myself to the system, you see, I do not want to lend myself to the system...Even if that may lend to confusion, even if the reader may not understand, I don’t care.”\footnote{Maryvonne Lapouge and Clelia Pisa, \textit{Brasileiras}, 201.} It is this almost anarchic attitude that sets Lispector apart, and that contributes to her air of mystery and oddness. She did what she felt, wrote what she felt, and that was that. She claims to lose interest in her books once written, although she does care about getting them published. She compares a book to a pregnancy: “Un livre c’est comme une gestation. Une fois mis en route, il fait bien que l’enfant sorte. Sinon il vous gêne. Il ne peut pas rester des mois, vingt mois par exemple, dans le ventre de sa mère. Il faut qu’il sorte, qu’il assume son destin. Cela fait, je le laisse aller, je le laisse suivre son chemin...”\footnote{Ibid. 202.} I will end this section here, on Lispector’s use of gestation as metaphor for writing, as a propitious way to enter Cixous’s texts. Cixous finds in Lispector her great exemplar of \textit{écriture feminine}, an appropriation to be evaluated in the pages that follow.

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I now turn to the texts themselves. I will be attentively reading two of Cixous’ writings on Lispector: her very first one, “Clarice Lispector: The Approach. Letting Oneself (be) Read (by) Clarice Lispector. The Passion According to C.L.,” alongside “The Author in Truth,” which deepens her approach reading practice. Cixous’ writings on Lispector are numerous, far too many to be read closely for the confines of this project. Much critical ink has also been spilled on the connection, hence, I have chosen these two pieces as they represent the foundation of Cixous’
approach to Lispector’s texts over time. They are also the most relevant in terms of her transmission to the Italian thinkers I will be discussing in the following chapters. Finally, as an example of the interconnected nature of this project of points of contact, I will end by reading a chapter from Adriana Cavarero’s *For More than One Voice* (A più voci: *Per una filosofia della espressione vocale*, 2003), in which Cavarero discusses Cixous and Lispector together.\(^{116}\)

The essay that started it all, in a sense, is “Clarice Lispector: The Approach. Letting Oneself (be) Read (by) Clarice Lispector. The Passion According to C.L.,” first published in 1979 (henceforth “The Approach”).\(^{117}\) Cixous deserves credit as the only thinker of this project that reads and comments Lispector’s fiction in almost its entirety. Cixous’ commentary and her writing style tend to be polarizing; her essay is impossible to characterize in terms of genre, much like Lispector’s novel. A variety of international feminist critics — Carol Ambruster, Verena Conley, Anne Rosalind Jones, Toril Moi, Susan Rubin Suleiman, Morag Shiach, Anna Klobucka, to name a few — have discussed and analyzed Cixous’s writings on Lispector, with varying degrees of criticism ranging from sympathetic to what is more often perceived as Cixous’ inappropriate appropriation of Lispector’s writing; several Latin American critics stand out — Marta Peixoto, Debra Castillo, Lúcia Peixoto Cherem, Laura Pirott-Quintero, Renata Wasserman, among others — for writing from a decolonial standpoint (though without using this more recent terminology). Peixoto, for example, flips the direction of knowledge in order to

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pursue “the reciprocal perspective, and ask about the pertinence of Cixous’ reading to an understanding of Lispector” instead of readings on “what Lispector meant for Cixous.”

Peixoto’s project is particularly interesting as she points to what she calls a “disturbing aspect in Cixous’ reading of Lispector: their self-positioning as a closed, intuitive dialogue between two kindred souls engaged in a mutual exchange, emphasized by Cixous’ titles and subtitles. (…) This fervent ‘dialogue,’ which allows no outside voices — it is telling that Cixous never mentions what any third party has said about Lispector — ultimately gives the false impression that Lispector is a sort of Cixousian twin.” The ‘dialogue’ was also engendered through Cixous’ informal, friendly use of “Clarice” in the first person. This notion of Lispector being Cixousian (Anna Klobucka gives several other examples) is the fusion I alluded to earlier in this chapter. As a counter example, Elena Carrera seems to find no issue with the twinning of Cixous-Lispector, as to her Cixous “does not need to engage with other critics of Lispector since she is not interested in finding an objective truth about Lispector, but in exploring her own subjectivity through the reading. She can simply go on speaking of herself, her own obsessions from inside the belly of Lispector’s texts.” I must object to Carrera’s positioning of Cixous within Lispector’s belly - the realities of the dynamics and flow of power between the two authors and their contexts simply do not allow for such a characterization.


119 Ibid. 42.

Approach is the most quoted idea of Cixous’ writings on Lispector, and has become emblematic of the Cixous-Lispector fusion. In “The Author in Truth,” she states: “the text teaches us that the most difficult thing to do is to arrive at the most extreme proximity while guarding against the trap of projection, of identification. The other must remain absolutely strange within the greatest possible proximity.”121 “The approach,” as Cixous calls it, is a reading practice that has much merit, but Cixous herself, as many before me have noted, has not been able to tow her own line.122 I believe, however, that the issue is not so much Cixous’ failure to keep with her own theory, it is the theory itself that should be investigated as a specific reading of Lispector’s text, The Passion According to G.H.. Cixous’ theory is based on her reading of G.H.’s failure when she consumes the roach - that she crosses the line and goes beyond extreme proximity to fusion with the Other. In my own reading, it is G.H.’s transgression of the line between herself and the cockroach Other that leads to her ultimate success: that of depersonalization - when there is no longer difference between self and other, human or otherwise, and there is only being. As the quote by Bernard Berenson chosen by Lispector to frame the novel says, “A complete life may be one ending in so full identification with the non-self that there is no self to die.”

The essay “The Approach” opens with Cixous situating Lispector, with her own idiosyncratically beautiful use of language. To me it is redolent of Lispector’s own response about not lending herself to “the system” in the anthology Brasileiras, which Cixous of course read:

121 Hélène Cixous, “The Author in Truth,” in Coming to Writing and Other Essays, 170-171.

Clarice Lispector: This woman, our contemporary, Brazilian (born in the Ukraine, of Jewish origin), gives us not books but living saved from books, from narratives, repressive constructions. And through her writing-window we enter the awesome beauty of learning to read: going, by way of the body, to the other side of the self.123

Cixous’ reading is material, of the female body that writes, as theorized in her well known work on écriture féminine. Cixous worked on her theory for years using only male examples - Joyce, Kafka, Genet, Rilke - hence, Lispector finally offered an example of a feminine libidinal economy authored by a woman. For Cixous, Lispector goes beyond male authors, as she describes, poetically, in “The Author in Truth:”

If Kafka had been a woman. If Rilke had been a Jewish Brazilian born in the Ukraine. If Rimbaud had been a mother, if he had reached the age of fifty. If Heidegger had been able to stop being German, if he had written the Romance of the Earth. Why have I cited these names? To sketch out the general vicinity. Over there is where Clarice Lispector writes. There, where the most demanding works breathe, she makes her way. But then, at the point where the philosopher gets winded, she goes on, further still than all knowledge. After comprehension, step by step, she plunges trembling into the incomprehensible shuddering depth of the world, the ultrasensitive ear, tensed to take in even the sound of the stars, even the minimal rubbing of atoms, even the silence between two heartbeats. Watchwoman, night-light of the world. She knows nothing. She didn’t read the philosophers. And yet sometimes you’d swear you could hear them murmur in her forests. She discovers everything.124

Lispector as a source of knowledge beyond knowledge - beyond patriarchal knowledge - is a reading that carries over to the Italian feminist readings as I will show in the following three chapters. Cixous’ discovery of Lispector revitalized her world, and her early essays reflect her desire to help others “read” Lispector: “How to “read” Clarice Lispector: In the passion


124 Ibid. 132-133.
according to her: according to C.L.: writing-a-woman.”

Yet, as many critics have shown, Cixous desires that others read Lispector as she herself does according to her own theory. The notion of approaching is not Cixous’ own; it comes directly from “C.L.” herself, from Lispector’s extraordinary address to her reader which opens the text of The Passion According to G.H.. The passage merits full reproduction here:

A Possíveis Leitores:
Este livro é como um livro qualquer. Mas eu ficaria contente se fosse lido apenas por pessoas de alma já formada. Aquelas que sabem que a aproximação, do que quer que seja, se faz gradualmente e penosamente — atravessando inclusive o oposto daquilo que se vai aproximar. Aquelas pessoas que, só elas, entenderão bem devagar que este livro nada tira de ninguém. A mim, por exemplo, o personagem G.H. foi dando pouco a pouco uma alegria difícil; mas chama-se alegria.
C.L. 126

To Possible Readers:
This book is like any other book. But I would be happy if it were only read by people whose souls are already formed. Those who know that the approach, of whatever it may be, happens gradually and painstakingly — even passing through the opposite of what it approaches. They who, only they, will slowly come to understand that this book takes nothing from no one. To me, for example, the character G.H. gave bit by bit a difficult joy; but it is called joy.
C.L. 127

Lispector herself offers a key for reading her text, although her book is certainly not like any other book! She “downplays” the book, before it even begins, as if anticipating that many would indeed not understand it. Lispector was herself extremely humble and disliked the mythical status she gained at home in Brazil. In part due to the very fact that she gave limited interviews, in the few that she conceded she tried to dispel the “myths” about her. In the fascinating 1977

125 Ibid. 59.
126 Clarice Lispector, A paixão segundo G.H., 5.
televised interview mentioned in the introduction, she speaks about *The Passion According to G.H.*, recalling how a Portuguese school teacher came to her in dismay, having not understood a thing about her novel; meanwhile, a 17 year old girl came to her to say that she reread the book many times, that is was her bedside book. Lispector tells this story in order to dispel the accusations of her writing being hermetic.

I quote the more recent Idra Novey New Directions translation in the above passage, however in the English translation of “Clarice Lispector: The Approach” in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, a different translation is used, and in the footnote, Cixous states that she translated from the Portuguese herself (though this means she translated into French; it is not clear whether the English is also by Cixous though it appears so). The fact that Cixous, who did not speak Portuguese, took the liberty to translate Lispector is quite pretentious given the notorious difficulty of translating Lispector. In the above passage, “approach” in the Cixous version is translated as *approximation*: “Those who know that approximation, to anything whatsoever, is done gradually and painfully—and that it has to traverse even the very opposite of what is being approached.”\textsuperscript{128} Approximation is simply incorrect in this case, it is a false cognate of *aproximação*; one cannot approximate *to* anything. Elsewhere in Cixous’ commentaries on Lispector, issues of translation have been raised by critics. “I might mention here that Cixous’s apparent command of Portuguese is not entirely adequate to the task of interpreting nuances of Lispector’s texts,” notes Peixoto, who reads a “rather cavalier and Francocentric attitude toward the letter of Lispector’s text, even as she examines it in detail.”\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{128} Cixous, “Clarice Lispector: The Approach,” 60.

\textsuperscript{129} Peixoto, 49.
I agree fully with Peixoto that Cixous seems unable or unwilling to tune into the real otherness of the Portuguese language; however, I must disagree with her when she describes Cixous’ reception of Lispector as one that “inverts the usual colonial and postcolonial dynamic.”\(^{130}\) Yes, historically, Latin Americans have translated and celebrated literature (and theory) from Europe and the United States; but what happens when the direction is reversed is not simply “the highest praise” an European or American can bestow a non-Western author as Peixoto oddly suggests.\(^{131}\) Being “chosen” does not change the hierarchy of power; it affirms it. Translation and publication in the North can begin to reverse the coloniality of power to some degree through exposure, and as I suggested in my introduction, fiction has an advantage over theory in breaking barriers and crossing borders. It is not surprising, then, that a white Brazilian woman author such as Lispector was the first to obtain such a “visa.” Yet, isn’t fiction concomitantly more vulnerable to appropriation than theory? Literature of the non-West/South is more consumable and less threatening than theory, hence its access to travel. The West desires/needs the creative raw material of the non-West, mirroring global capitalist flows of goods and people. As Laura Pirott-Quintero argues, Cixous’ “texts reproduce the same appropriative, patriarchal economy that Cixous denounces ‘in theory.’”\(^{132}\)

The Franco-Italian readings of Lispector are part of feminist anti-humanist project of finding sources of women’s knowledge, and are therefore antipatriarchal acts. The problem with the European feminist readings is the complete disregard, or misreading, of the local and global

\(^{130}\) Ibid. 40.

\(^{131}\) Ibid. In Brazil texts from Europe were also “cannibalized.” See Manifesto antropófago/Cannibal Manifesto.

\(^{132}\) Laura Pirott-Quintero, “Textual Violence in Feminist Criticism: The Case of Hélène Cixous and Clarice Lispector.”
historical contexts involved in reading a female, Brazilian author, which in the case of Cixous, according to critics such as Peixoto, Pirott-Quintero, Klobucka, and myself, leads, unwittingly, to textual violences.

As Peixoto notes incisively, “While on the surface Cixous offers Lispector praise, warmth, and a generous receptivity—a nurturing text modeled after the very pattern she ascribes to Lispector—she also silences Lispector by muting and replacing her words.”\textsuperscript{133} For example, in “The Author in Truth,” Cixous speaks of the character Macabea from Lispector’s final novel \textit{A hora da estrela, (The Hour of the Star)}:

Let us try to imagine what would be for each of us, male and female, the most “other” possible, the strangest creature possible, while nevertheless remaining within the sphere of the recognizable; what is the terrestrial creature that would be the strangest possible and would at the same time “touch” us. Everyone has a personal stranger. For Clarice it was this little bit of life [Macabea], coming from the \textit{Nordeste} of Brazil. The \textit{Nordeste} has, sadly, become famous: people there are happy when they eat rat. A land where in our own time people die of famine, an occidental India.\textsuperscript{134}

It is important to recall that Clarice Lispector grew up in the \textit{Nordeste}, so it is not a strange place for her; on the contrary, she was profoundly marked by her childhood experiences, and like Macabea, made the move from the \textit{Nordeste} to the capital, Rio de Janeiro. In contrast to Cixous, here is how Lispector herself describes the \textit{Nordeste}:

\begin{quote}
I grew up in Recife, and I think that to live in the Northeast or North of Brazil is to live more intensely and closely the true Brazilian life, that there, in the interior, does not receive the influence of customs from other countries. My credences were learned in Pernambuco, the foods I most love are Pernambucan. And through housekeepers, I learned the rich local folklore.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{133} Peixoto, 43.

\textsuperscript{134} Cixous, “The Author in Truth,” 141.

We see how the lack of knowledge about Lispector and the region shape Cixous’ reading of the novel; her characterization of the Brazilian northeast as *an occidental India* is unfortunately and revealingly a sign of her times.

Returning to “The Approach,” Cixous splices the humbleness of “a moment of a reading” with an interpretation which is an example of why critics such as Toril Moi called her critiques essentialist: “What follows is a moment of a reading of C.L.: carried out in the C.L. correspondence with all women.”\textsuperscript{136} Cixous tends to universalize what Lispector writes, while also speaking “for” Lispector (and all women), yet in the same text she claims that “it is the living space, the betweenus, that we must take care to keep,” and “we must save the approach that opens and leaves space for the other.”\textsuperscript{137} She ends the essay with a question, “And woman?” to which she answers: “There must be a wait so powerfully thoughtful, open, toward beings so close, so womanly-familiar that they are forgotten for it, so that the day will come in which the women who have always been—there, will at last appear.”\textsuperscript{138} Throughout the essay Cixous speaks of how Lispector (and I agree) “be-things the thing into the thing,” and helps us “discover the splendor of an egg in all its strangeness” which “takes a much greater force than getting us to admire a mountain.”\textsuperscript{139} However, there is a major element of Lispector’s text that Cixous does not see, the woman who has always been there but does not appear to Cixous: Janair, the maid.

\textsuperscript{136} Cixous, “Clarice Lispector: The Approach,” 60.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid. 62.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. 77.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid. 68.
“So woman is: the woman-and-the-other,” writes Cixous, yet she only sees G.H.; the Other she sees in the text is the cockroach: “while Cixous correctly understands that, in The Passion, the cockroach is feminine and represents the feminine Other, she fails to see that the feminine Other is also black.”¹⁴⁰ Race and gender are inextricable here at the coloniality of gender. Janair is, in fact, the only person who is named in the novel, and the main “action” of The Passion According to G.H. takes place in Janair’s former room. The limited plot of the experimental novel is that G.H. decides to go clean the room of her maid, Janair, who had quit the day before. G.H. describes her apartment as such: “The apartment reflects me. It’s on the top floor, which is considered an elegance. People of my milieu try to live in the so-called “penthouse.” It’s much more than an elegance. It’s a real pleasure: from there you dominate a city.”¹⁴¹ G.H., dominant bourgeois woman, delineates her plan for the day:

Maybe I’d start cleaning at the back of the apartment: the maid’s room must be filthy, given its dual roles as a sleeping space and storage room for old clothes, suitcases, ancient newspapers, wrapping paper and leftover twine. I’d clean and ready it for the new maid. Then, from the back, I’d slowly “climb” horizontally until I reached the opposite end of the apartment which was the living room, where — as if I myself were the finish line of the arrangements of the morning— I’d read the newspaper, stretched out on the sofa, and probably fall asleep.¹⁴²

Lispector was often accused of not being socially engaged enough with her “interior” writing, an accusation which betrays a lack of close reading and understanding of her texts. To me, they are profoundly revealing of issues of gender, race and class in Brazil at the time, as the above passage proves in detail. We see how G.H.’s expectations of a filthy room are in line with racist

¹⁴⁰ Levilson C. Reis, “The Invisible, the Unclean, the Uncanny: The Feminine Black Other in Lispector’s The Passion According to G.H.” The Explicator Vol. 68, No. 2 (2010) 133.

¹⁴¹ Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 22.

¹⁴² Ibid. 26.
and classist stereotypes, as well as how Janair’s room was also a storage room, dehumanizing Janair as a thing to be stored. Of course there would be a new maid, there would always be a new maid, another disposable less-than-human to replace the one that came before. G.H. then layers her hierarchal social status with a map of the layout of her apartment — back to front / bottom to top — with her own position as “the finish line.” The fact that this was all described with nonchalance serves to highlight the embeddedness of this living situation in Brazilian society. Lispector brilliantly offers to us, the readers, an opportunity to witness these women’s racial and social circumstances, to picture the physical and metaphorical divide, that separates them.

Upon entering the “bas-fond,” G.H. expected to open the door to “the pile of newspapers and the darkness of dirt and of the junk,” but instead:

But when I opened the door my eyes winced in reverberations and physical displeasure.
Because instead of the confused murk I was expecting, I bumped into the vision of a room that was a quadrilateral of white light; my eyes protected themselves by squinting. (…)
I’d expected to find darkness, I’d been prepared to throw open the window and clean out the dank darkness with fresh air. I hadn’t expected the maid, without a word to me, to have arranged the room in her own way, stripping it of its storage function as brazenly as if she owned it.143

The effect of the clean room is its transformation and reversal: “The room seemed to be on a level incomparably higher than the apartment itself.”144 The juxtaposition of light and dark also point to the racial undertones of the descriptions of the room which stand in for G.H. and Janair. The most striking element of this passage, however, is how G.H. interprets Janair’s actions: she sees it as an affront to her authority, a transgression. It is sad that a person making herself a

143 Ibid. 29.
144 Ibid. 30.
comfortable living space is a transgressive act, a person trying to assert her humanity in the face of treated like a dirty thing that goes with other things in storage. G.H. feels constrained by the absent maid; the actions of Janair leave G.H. feeling like a stranger in her own home. And then it occurs to her that Janair despised her: “For years I had only been judged by my peers and by my own milieu that was, as a whole, made of myself and for myself. Janair was the first truly outside person of whose gaze I was becoming aware.” Finally G.H. feels the “silent hatred of that woman.”\textsuperscript{145}The presence of Janair’s imaginary gaze is not only a reversal of the usual direction of the \textit{patroa-empregada} relationship, but also in fact a \textit{first} in Brazilian literature, making Lispector’s text all the more remarkable.\textsuperscript{146}

Slowly, G.H. begins to see Janair. As her visualization progresses, G.H. describes her with the material acuity of a sculptor, becoming more and more aware of her maid:

I saw her black and motionless face again, saw her wholly opaque skin that seemed more like yet another of her ways of being silent, her extremely well drawn eyebrows, I saw her fine and delicate features barely discernible against the closed-off blackness of her skin.

Her features—I discovered without pleasure—were the features of a queen. And her posture too: her body erect, thin, hard, smooth, almost fleshless, lacking breasts or hips. And her clothes? It wasn’t surprising that I’d used her as if she had no presence: beneath her small apron, she always wore dark brown or black, which made her entirely dark and invisible—I shivered to discover that until now I hadn’t noticed that the woman was an invisible person.

(…) calm and compact rage of that woman who represented silence as though representing a foreign country, the African queen. And she’d been lodging there inside my house, the foreigner, the indifferent enemy.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid. 32.

\textsuperscript{146} Sônia Roncador, \textit{A doméstica imaginária: Literatura, testemunhos e invenção da empregada doméstica no Brasil (1889-1999)}, (Brasilia: Editora Universidade de Brasilia, 2008), 138.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid. 32-33 and 35.
I quote all of these passages on Janair purposefully and repeatedly as part of my decolonial strategy of re-inscribing her into the narrative. I interrupt my reading of Cixous with stretches of the original text so it may speak for itself. Notably, Cixous never quotes from this chapter of *The Passion According to G.H.*; she does not misrepresent Janair as Muraro, Cavarero and Braidotti will; she simply does not represent her at all. In contrast, in Lispector’s text, an awareness begins to set in for G.H.: “I wondered if Janair had really despised me—or if I, who hadn’t even looked at her, had been the one who despised her.” This awareness does not, however, prove that G.H. has had an epiphany with regard to issues of race and class; the awareness is simply that of recognition: Janair is now visible, though she is still despised. G.H. next imagines washing the room with buckets of water as though to finally wash any last traces of Janair, and it is only after she had imagined this re-transformation of the clean room back into “me and mine,” that G.H. actually enters the room.148

Of Cixous’s ignorance of Janair, Pirott-Quintero notes, “it is not surprising that she disregards the importance of Janair, the maid, for in her *écriture féminine* she overlooks the intersecting sites of oppression that women experience that go beyond sexual oppression and include discrimination based on race and class.”149 At least in her early essays, we can perhaps allow that intersectionality or intersectional theory as coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 had not yet entered the Western feminist narrative. Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other; this is at the core of Cixous’s blindness towards Janair. Intersectional theory has been itself criticized, for

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148 In the very next chapter of *The Passion*, G.H. will meet the cockroach, which some critics consider another version of Janair; I will discuss this issue in Chapter Three.

149 Pirott-Quintero, 5.
example by Jasbir Puar, who argues that although intersectional analysis was meant to challenge
the all-pervasive rubrics of race, class, and gender in Western feminism, it actually “recenters the
very white feminism it sought to decentralize (…) in seeking to stress the difference of the other,
in the end constitutes this other (woman) and gives her a color (non-white).”150 The main
problem with intersectionality according to Puar is its inability to deal with the material body.
Puar prefers material feminism (she refers to feminist scholars in science and technology) with
its notion that “bodies are unstable assemblages that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into
identity formations.”151

In “The Author in Truth,” (in which she mostly discusses The Hour of the Star), Cixous
devotes time to re-affirming her theory of non-appropriative approach conceived in “Clarice
Lispector: The Approach.” Here, Cixous mirrors herself and Lispector to the point of asking,
“Who are you who are so strangely me?” Much like what she describes G.H. doing erroneously
in the novel, she blurs the line between herself and Lispector:

It happens, in a certain chapter of this clandestine Bible, that G.H. thinks she has
at last reached the point of maturation where she will be able to love the right way, to
make space for the other, to make the supreme gesture with regard to the cockroach.
(…) she brings to her mouth this white issue of the barata, and then a violent incident
takes place: she (G.H.) disappears, she vomits with disgust, she faints, vomits herself up.
And the marvelous thing about this story: she immediately realized, passing through the
portal of error, that she was mistaken. Her mistake was that she did not tie up the space
to the other, and that, in the immoderation of love, she told herself, “I am going to
overcome my disgust, and I am going to go as far as the gesture of supreme communion.
I am going to kiss the leper.” But the kiss of the leper transformed into metaphor lost its
truth.

Communing with the material of the barata is a kind of grandiloquence. Too
much desire and too much knowledge taint the act and cause G.H. to fall into heroism.
Eating the barata is not a proof of sainthood; it is an idea. This is the mistake. Zealous,


151 Ibid. 86.
but not wise, G.H. makes the gesture, which she does not analyze at the time, of incorporation. Immediately castigated by a flash of truth, she brings up the cockroach, and the step-by-step, page-by-page, insect-like approach starts up again all the way to the ultimate revelation. The text teaches us that the most difficult thing to do is to arrive at the most extreme proximity while guarding against the trap of projection, of identification. The other must remain absolutely strange within the greatest possible proximity.\footnote{Cixous, “Coming to Writing,” 170-171.}

Cixous reads G.H.’s consumption of the cockroach as erroneous, but in the final pages of her text Lispector writes the opposite:

\begin{quote}
Oh God, I was feeling baptized by the world. I had put a roach’s matter into my mouth, and finally performed the tiniest act.
Not the maximum act, as I had thought before, not heroism and sainthood. But at last the tiniest act that I had always been missing. I had always been incapable of the tiniest act. And with the tiniest act, I had deheroized myself. I, who had lived from the middle of the road, had finally taken the first step along its beginning.
Finally, finally, my casing had really broken and without limit I was.\footnote{Ibid. 189.}
\end{quote}

It is Cixous who fails, willfully or not, to see that without the experience of eating the matter of the roach, G.H. could not have arrived at transcendence. It was not eating that was erroneous; it was considering it heroism. The act itself is fundamental; without it, G.H. cannot reach the limitlessness and oneness of being, attained through the failure of language, not her action as failure. G.H.’s “casing,” her human/roach/frame form breaks open and and she can finally reveal her ultimate identification, not with the roach, but with life: “Life just is for me, and I don't understand what I’m saying. And so I adore it. — — — — — — —”\footnote{Ibid. 189.}

\[\text{\footnotesize 152 Cixous, “Coming to Writing,” 170-171.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 153 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 188.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 154 Ibid. 189.}\]
I want to round out my work on Cixous by reading Adriana Cavarero’s brief but significant discussion of Cixous and Lispector in her 2005 book *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. In the book, Cavarero explores the embodied uniqueness of the subject as manifested in the person’s voice: it is not what is said that matters, but *who* is speaking. She states that “symptomatically, the symbolic patriarchal order that identifies the masculine with reason and the feminine with the body is precisely an order that privileges the semantic with respect to the vocal.” The act of speaking is relational, what it communicates, according to Cavarero, is the “acoustic, empirical, material relationally of singular voices.” This vocal ontology of “uniqueness” challenges logocentrism, and can be a radical form of relation that precedes the order of language. She emphasizes that the relation between “uniquenesses” is what can create a “politics of the voice.”

In the chapter “Truth Sings in Key,” Cavarero re-reads Cixous’ writings, particularly those on Lispector, casting them in a new, positive, intriguing light. Cavarero reads Cixous’s theory and practice of *écriture feminine* as a refusal of the phallocentric dichotomy writing/speech. The source of the vocalic lies in the maternal: “warm and bodily, like the mother’s breast that nourishes the baby, the voice flows and inundates, like a song, inaugurating the musicality of language.” That was Cavarero writing, not Cixous! Similar to the stylistic overlap Cixous was criticized for vis-a-vis Lispector, here Cavarero seems to be carried away by Cixous’ particular

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156 Ibid. 6.
157 Ibid. 13.
158 Ibid. 139-140
style. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, Cavarero emphasizes a maternal continuum in her work, hence she connects positively with Cixous’s idea that there is always something of the ‘mother’ in every woman, and that women have a privileged relation with song and with the musical materiality of language (mother here being understood, she notes, not as a role in then social order but as a source of goodness). It is not clear to me, however, why women have a privileged relationship to that “language-milk,” do male babies not also participate in the “oral pleasures and infantile vocalizations?” What does make sense is the notion of a primary musicality, the “vocalic” which precedes the semantic.

Cavarero identifies Cixous’ originality through her link to writing: “l’écriture feminine is a fluid, overwhelmingly rhythmic writing, which breaks the rules of the symbolic, making syntax explode. It precedes and exceeds the codes that govern the phallocentric logos.”159 Cixous, like Lispector, subverts the rules of grammar, which follows rules of gender. For Cavarero, Cixous’ “feminine” is song, rhythm, and an imaginary that is linked to the maternal body, a whole constellation of references that, according to her, have become standard lexicon among feminists. I would argue here, however, that many feminists take issue with the maternal lexicon as limiting. Cavarero uses the pleasure of the maternal bond to connect the the pleasure of the poetic song, which coincides with the register of the unconscious in which there is no ego. She makes the connection between Cixous and Lispector through this loss of a unified “I”:

Just as in the texts of Clarice Lispector, to whom Cixous dedicated some of her best theoretical essays, the codes that organize the “I” and discourse are broken under the wave of a vocal flux in which someone laughs, cries, screams, and breathes, singing in writing the advent of his or her own disorganization.160

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159 Ibid. 141.
160 Ibid. 142.
The voice therefore brings the text back to life. Yet then Cavarero makes an argument that does not seem to follow: that the disorganization ends up washing away the uniqueness the voice announces. She says that from the perspective of Cixous, Lispector, and Kristeva, “the subversive and anti metaphysical role of the acoustic sphere still does not explicitly thematize vocalic uniqueness. The dismantling of the “I,” does not reveal the unique existent that vibrates in each voice.” Instead, she says, multiple “I’s” emerge in the unconscious.

This seems to contradict her own theory of vocal uniqueness. Cavarero makes the case for the autobiographical nature of Cixous’ writing as that which brings the uniqueness back into the picture. In other words, it is the continual manifesting presence of a uniqueness that makes itself text, of a singular life that overflows into writing (but what about non-autobiographical writing, or is she suggesting all writing is autobiographical to some degree?). Cavarero acknowledges there is an ambiguity that arises from the problem of a singular experience that is also de-individualized. She does not extend this ambiguity to Lispector’s *The Passion*, although it might be something to think about. Instead, she jumps to “what can be useful for feminism,” which is “Cixous’ insistence on a vocalic sphere that is relational—not only because this relation is centered on the maternal figure and does not exhaust its potential in the scene of infancy, but rather because this relation, by operating in the register of speech and writing, makes itself heard as rhythm, reverberation, echo. This echo, this play of assonances and acoustic repetitions, is an originary opening to the other.” In the case of Cixous and Lispector, can we speak of relational resonances or are we really dealing with ventriloquizing? Or is Lispector the other-mother source

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161 Ibid. 143.
162 Ibid. 144.
of language and its rhythm for Cixous, then? It would seem so when she writes: “A woman’s voice came to me from far away, like a voice from a birth-town” or “From Brazil a voice came to return the lost orange to me,” where orange is a play on words of linking to her birthplace, Oran. Isn’t an echo one's own voice, not the voice of an other? It seems that in Cixous’ writing, the pleasure comes from her own writing as much as from the Lispector-milk; the “voice” of Lispector is just a resonance of herself, a problematic echoing that erases Lispector’s uniqueness as an embodied voice.
CHAPTER TWO:

LUSIA MURARO:

THE PASSION ACCORDING TO G.H. AS POETICS

(I don’t know what I am calling God but thus he may be called.)

—Clarice Lispector, The Passion According to G.H.

Luisa Muraro (1940-) is one of the most active, important, and at times polemic feminist thinkers in Italy. She is a founder of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective (Libreria delle Donne di Milano, 1975), one of the founding members of Diotima, a women’s philosophical community in Verona, and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Verona. In the anthology Le filosofie femministe, Italian feminism is said to have been born “contemporaneamente a quello dei paesi più avanzati sul piano economico, sociale e politico.” It is not until the 1980’s however, according to the anthology, that a real theoretical, philosophical Italian presence is felt, through the activities of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, and especially the group of thinkers called Diotima, from which Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero stand out (Cavarero

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163 Adriana Cavarero and Franco Restiano, Le filosofie femministe, (Milano: Mondadori, 2002) 69. As I discussed in the previous chapter, there is far more overlap with Latin American feminist history than this statement would allow, especially in the Italian context of Anni di Piombo.
leaves the group in 1990). The theories that emerge are centered on *la differenza sessuale* and the construction of an alternative feminist language and practice; Cavarero emphasizes the problem of gendered language and the need to find a way out; Muraro focuses her attention on social practices, proposing a theory of *affidamento* (entrustment) between women that will provoke consensus and dissent.164

Generally speaking, Italian feminist thought has been marginalized in the dominant Western feminist narrative, although Cavarero and especially Braidotti will fare better than most, including Muraro, and there is quite abundant literature available on Italian feminism since the 1990’s in English.165 Muraro in particular has become a casualty of the process of “the decade by decade fixing of shifts in feminist theory,” which subsequently leads to the fixing of “who is identified as belonging to which decade,” as Clare Hemmings describes in *Why Stories Matter*. Hence, she has been, within the Anglo-American Western feminist fantasy of progress, “surpassed.” Complicating matters, her work has also mostly not been translated to English. I believe Muraro’s polemic practices merit revisiting in the context of the reemergence of material feminisms. Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion According to G.H.* permeates the span of Muraro’s theoretical writings from early texts until present day, as she herself says, “la scrittrice brasliana Clarice Lispector mi fa da guida così come Virgilio a Dante nell’Inferno.”166 Thus, I want to

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164 My translation/paraphrasing. Ibid. 70.


make the particular erasure of Muraro visible, by telling her story. I will also explore how The Passion According to G.H. becomes, over time, an almost inextricable part of Muraro’s narrative, her poetics, her politics.\textsuperscript{167} Lispector’s impact on Muraro is manifested in a citation practice that spans almost every single major publication by the Italian thinker, yet as we have seen with Cixous, the presence of Lispector in Muraro’s work is to be read with vigilance from a decolonial feminist standpoint.

The first Clarice Lispector novel to be published in Italian in 1981 was Un apprendistato o il libro dei piaceri (An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights, published originally in Brazil in 1969), followed immediately in 1982 by La passione secondo G.H., (The Passion According to G.H., originally published in 1964).\textsuperscript{168} On the occasion of Feltrinelli’s reedition of The Passion in 2013, Muraro reminisces,

Nel convegno a lei dedicato (Lectures Lispectoriennes entre Europe et Amériques, Parigi, 12-14 maggio 2011) una femminista del Brasile ha reso questa testimonianza: “Clarice non fu femminista ma in Brasile il movimento femminista si è subito riconosciuto in lei e da lei ha preso forza”. Non soltanto in Brasile, aggiungo io. Le più vecchie di noi probabilmente ricordano La passione secondo G.H. apparsa a Torino nel 1982, nell’ottima traduzione di Adelina Aletti, con una nota di Angelo Morino, presso la piccola casa editrice La Rosa, fondata da Edda Melon. Erano gli anni d’oro del movimento femminista, tra i cui meriti c’è anche l’aver incoraggiato gli editori a pubblicare libri scritti da donne.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{167} If I were to teach a course on Luisa Muraro, I would include a mandatory reading of The Passion According to G.H.

\textsuperscript{168} Un apprendistato o il libro dei piaceri, trad. e introduzione di Rita Desti, con una nota di Luciana Stegagno Picchio, (Torino: La rosa, 1981). La passione secondo G. H., trad. di Adelina Aletti, con una nota di Angelo Morino, (Torino, La rosa, 1982).

\textsuperscript{169} Luisa Muraro, “Habemus Clarice Lispector!” \url{http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/habemus-clarice-lispector/}
There are several notable points in Muraro’s recent narration: first and foremost, she mentions the importance of Lispector to the Brazilian feminist community, information she gained through the testimony of a Brazilian feminist. This is, from a decolonial standpoint, fundamental and represents a shift compared to her earlier writings as we will see. After situating Lispector, Muraro adds her own local Italian experience. She is largely responsible for the diffusion of Lispector’s work in the Italian feminist community, through efforts similar to those of Cixous. Muraro pays tribute to the efforts of small publishers such as Edda Melon, dedicated to publishing international women’s writing, again along the lines of Cixous and Antoinette Fouque. Sadly, La Rosa no longer exists (it operated from 1979-1991). Hardly any record of its existence is available for study other than the catalogue of publications, making it difficult to ascertain if there was anyone else at La Rosa responsible for pushing the publication of Lispector in particular, as was the case with Clelia Pisa in France.

To the best of my knowledge, Muraro does not explicitly cite the work of Cixous on Lispector in any of her writings or interviews until very recently, in her essay published in Clarice Lispector: une pensée en écriture pour notre temps (2013), a volume which collects texts by the participants of the conference in Paris mentioned by Muraro above. However, Muraro had strong connections to the French feminist scene as both a translator and a reader, which contributed to her early knowledge and interest in Lispector’s work. The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, of which Muraro was a founder, participated in several meetings with French counterparts, including with the MLF (Mouvement de libération des femmes), which as we know from Chapter One was founded by Antoinette Fouque, who published Lispector in
France. Edda Melon of La Rosa was also a specialist in French literature. In 1977, Muraro translated Cixous’ play based on Freud’s famous case study “Dora,” *Portrait de Dora, (Ritratto di Dora)*, and quotes Cixous’s 1975 *La jeune né in Diotima: Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*. Most importantly, for fifteen years, beginning in 1975 with *Speculum: Of the Other Woman*, she became the principal translator of Luce Irigaray’s work into Italian (with some Italian editions appearing almost simultaneously as the French), as well as Irigaray’s personal translator and interlocutor during her visits to Italy. Cixous’s essay focusing on *The Passion According to G.H.*, “L’approche du Clarice Lispector,” was published in 1979, but was only published in Italian in 1988. Meanwhile, Muraro publishes her own reading of *The Passion*, based on a seminar she held at the University of Verona, “Commento alla ‘Passione secondo G.H.’” in 1987.

Lispector’s feminist reception in France and Italy is much more intertwined and varied than the current Anglo-Western narrative, based almost exclusively on Cixous, allows. In her review of Feltrinelli’s 2013 publication of *Le passioni e i legami*, a collection of Lispector’s work which includes *The Passion According to G.H.*, Muraro takes the opportunity to comment

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172 For Muraro’s account of her relationship with Irigaray, see Muraro, *Non si può insegnare tutto*, (Milano: La Scuola, 2013): 81-82.


on the local Italian cultural-editorial practices that led to the disappearance of Lispector’s *capolavoro* from the market for almost three decades:


As Hemmings puts it, “which story one tells about the past is always motivated by the position one occupies or wishes to occupy in the present,” which can be read in between the lines of Muraro’s phrasing in the above passage. She both confirms and distances herself from the dominant current of Anglo-Western feminist narrative present in Italy which focuses on “trendy” Anglo-American writers, while at the same time cementing an alternative narrative for herself — and by implication all Italian feminist thinkers — as underdogs both at home and abroad. Muraro questions why Feltrinelli would publish Lispector, who she claims is closer to Italian feminism than American feminism, and not publish Italian feminism.

The appropriation of Lispector as closer to so-called “latin” feminisms versus “nordic gender theory” only emphasizes geographical-ideological divisions of feminist narratives. Muraro’s use of the word “latino” demonstrates her neglect of Latin America in creating an all-encompassing “latin” category: who exactly is included in this group? All speakers of languages descended from Latin, including the Southern hemisphere? As Hemmings points out in her book,

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175 Luisa Muraro, “Alfabeta2” n. 31, luglio-agosto 2013. I wish she would actually tell the story!

continental European feminists often and even vehemently critique the predominance of the Anglo-American story as descriptive of all Western feminist theory’s trajectory, yet they only offer a Eurocentric alternative. Muraro seems so focused on her own scene that she proposes that Lispector’s work is closer to Italian rather than American feminism as one of the reasons why her work was not published in Italy for so long, without any regard to the reality of Lispector being a female and Brazilian writer, writing in Portuguese. Muraro tends to diminish Lispector’s Brazilian-ness/foreign-ness/Otherness: “tutto questo che ho detto e il tanto altro che si può dire di lei, diventa superfluo in presenza della sua opera. Devo spiegare come. Nella sua opera c’è il molto e il tanto altro di ogni esistenza umana, tra gli estremi coincidenti del silenzio e del reale, ma è tutto preso nel processo del suo diventare impersonale.”\(^{177}\) For Muraro, Lispector’s use of language transcends any boundaries or politics of location — personal, geographical, historical or otherwise. This is meant as a testament to Lispector’s work, yet becomes problematic when Muraro conflates what Lispector does in her texts with her as a person.\(^{178}\) The process of depersonalization in Lispector’s writing leads to the “universalization” and hence deterritorialization — de-brazilian-ification — of her texts and her, erasing her difference and struggle as a Latin American woman writer.

Public statements such as the ones just discussed are barometers of the local Italian feminist scene, as well as vehicles of information on Lispector in Italy, hence they are also part of the coloniality of gender and must be evaluated as part of a decolonial feminist project.

Moving from contexts to texts, does Luisa Muraro erase Clarice Lispector’s difference in her

\(^{177}\) Luisa Muraro, “Alfabeta2” n. 31, luglio-agosto 2013.

\(^{178}\) As I discussed in the introduction, Lispector’s Brazilianness was actually of great importance to her.
feminist philosophical writings? How do her readings differ from Hélène Cixous’s? The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to explore Luisa Muraro’s citations of Lispector in her texts: I will demonstrate how they become both part of Muraro’s foundational self-formation myth propagated repeatedly over time, as well as a key to her politico-poetics, a term I use to encompass her theories and practices. As with Cixous, Muraro has written far too many texts which cite Lispector to do justice to, hence, I have chosen the following texts as emblematic of the development of Muraro’s theoretical writings over time: “Commento all ‘Passione secondo G.H.’,” *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale, L’ordine simbolico della madre*, and “Une pensée-vie extra-philosophique.”

Muraro’s 1987 “Commento alla ‘Passione secondo G.H.’” is a foundational text in more ways than one: “nel testo della Passione ho trovato, per me e per le studentesse che studiano filosofia con me, la nostra iniziazione al lavoro filosofico.”179 Muraro is referring to the philosophical community Diotima, founded in 1984 in conjunction with the University of Verona and with strong ties to the Libreria delle donne di Milano. In the first lines of her *commento*, Muraro states that she does not intend to interpret or explain the text, but “nutrirsi di un pensiero.” She describes *La passione secondo G.H.* as “un libro extrafilosofico:”

...intendo un libro che non si trova dentro alla storia della filosofia perché ne è stato messo fuori, e questo non recentemente ma molto, molto tempo fa, sebbene il libro come tale sia stato pubblicato nel 1964 e scritto, probabilmente, poco prima. Ma il suo pensiero è più antico ed è antica anche la sua estromissione dalla filosofia.180

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179 Muraro, “Commento alla ‘Passione secondo G.H.’,” 73. Initiation is also a word Cixous uses when referring to Lispector…

For Muraro, Lispector’s novel *is* philosophy; the near absence of female figures in the history of philosophy drove her to look for them outside of philosophy books. For Muraro and by extension *Diotima*, Lispector’s philosophical novel breaks with traditional phallocentric philosophical thought and language, resulting in a model feminist philosophers can emulate. As will often be her strategy, Muraro simultaneously weaves together a personal narrative of how the text impacted her and her students with a reading of Lispector’s text based on *il pensiero della differenza sessuale*: “Il segno della differenza sessuale è il sacramento che G.H. celebra nella stanza della sua domestica.” What I find problematic about this statement is that, like Cixous, Muraro takes possession of Lispector’s text as that which demonstrates her own theory; this type of truth statement is demonstrative of the directionality of power, the unquestioned applicability of Western theories to non-Western texts.

Missing from Muraro’s commentary is any information about Clarice Lispector; she does not situate her at all, unlike Cixous, who at least usually devotes some lines to Lispector’s Jewish-Brazilian background. And then there is the missing person of the text: Janair, the maid who will remain unnamed for the duration of the essay. Muraro identifies so strongly with G.H. that she, like Cixous, cannot see Janair. “The maid” is described by ellipsis in the first section of the essay when Muraro delineates the “plot” of the novel: “Prima del passaggio attraverso l’enormità del bisogno, viene per G.H. l’identificazione di sé con il suo essere donna. (…) lei, donna di gradevole aspetto, della buona borghesia, sensibile e intelligente, sola ma non solitaria, decide di fare un po’ d’ordine nella stanza della sua domestica che ha lasciato il servizio il giorno

181 Muraro, *Non si può insegnare tutto*, 112. *The Passion* is still the first on her list in 2013

prima.” Muraro affirms the marginality of Janair. What Muraro also neglects is the section of the previous chapter where G.H. describes herself as “being in quotes,” represented by the initials carved onto her suitcases: “This her, G.H. in the leather of her suitcases, was I: is it I—still? No.” The G.H. asking the question is the G.H. narrating the events of the day before, hence, in the extraordinary phrase of the following chapter, “I finally got up from the breakfast table, that woman.” That woman is the “woman” G.H. was before the journey recounted in the rest of the novel, before her passion of depersonalization. So what Muraro describes as G.H. is actually the idea of an ideal woman, a woman in quotes, the façade—not the true G.H.. The clean, bright room G.H. found instead of the darkness and disorder she expected based on racial and social prejudices, “was a violation of my quotation marks, the quotation marks that made me a citation of myself. The room was the portrait of an empty stomach.”

Muraro, unlike Cixous, does mention that “the maid” left a mural on the wall, a rough drawing of the naked outlines of three figures: a man, a woman, a dog. “The drawing wasn’t a decoration,” Lispector writes, “it was a writing:"

The memory of the absent maid constrained me. I wanted to remember her face, and to my astonishment couldn’t—she’d managed to exclude me from my own house, as if she’d shut the door and left me a stranger to my own dwelling. The recollection of her face escaped me, it had to be a temporary lapse.

But her name—right, right, I finally remembered: Janair. And, looking at the hieratic drawing, it suddenly occurred to me that Janair despised me. (…)

In a way my discomfort was amusing: it had never occurred to me that, in Janair’s muteness, there might have been a reprimand of my life, which her silence might have called “a wanton life”? how had she judged me?

I looked at the mural where I was likely depicted…I, the Man. And as for the dog—was that the epithet she gave me? For years I had only been judged by my peers and by

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183 Ibid. 67.
185 Ibid. 34. See also Chapter One for more on the whiteness of the room.
my own milieu that was, as a whole, made of myself and for myself. Janair was the first truly outside person of whose gaze I was becoming aware.

(...) 

I wondered if Janair had really despised me—or if I, who hadn’t even looked at her, had been the one who despised her.\(^\text{186}\)

I quote this passage at length because it is the passage in which Lispector names Janair. See Janair at the coloniality of gender. The invisible black woman other.\(^\text{187}\) This passage in its fullness is an important decolonial feminist antidote to the erasure of Janair in the readings by Muraro and Cixous, an antidote that will require administration in the Cavarero and Braidotti chapters as well. The relationship between G.H. and Janair reflects the racial and socioeconomic reality of Brazil, a painful, complex reality Lispector describes with nuance. The drawings on the wall are a message from Janair to G.H., and from Lispector to us the readers.

The above English translation has one major overly interpretive flaw: “a wanton life” in the original Portuguese is “uma vida de homens,” which is literally “a man’s life.” Hence why G.H. says that Janair considered her the “Man,” which is not as clear with the “wanton” translation; her silence and her drawing-writing are Janair’s reprimand - the reprimand of an outsider, an other - roles associated with women. Not just a man, but a cachorro, a man that is a dog, the denunciatory Brazilian epithet Janair adds to her judgment (or, revealingly, G.H. interprets as such). Muraro, instead, reads the drawings by “the maid” simply as, “Lei vi legge, prima con imbarazzo, poi con autentico malessere, un giudizio che la sua domestica avrebbe

\(^{186}\) Ibid. 32. and after the (...) 35.

pronunciato su lei, G.H., identificandola spregiativamente (il cagnetto) con un uomo.”¹⁸⁸ Janair judges G.H. as a man, not just because of her lifestyle and freedom, but also because of the way G.H. treats her: with hatred and indifference. The gender reversal here reflects the social hierarchy of power and dominance between men and women. G.H. - a rich, single, white, woman artist living in a penthouse - must be a man to Janair. How else could she exist?

The lifestyle and freedom of G.H. is actually described in detail in the novel, in the same chapter that has the quotation marks. G.H. literally asks, “That morning, before entering the maid’s room, what was I? I was what others had always seen me be, and that was how I knew myself.”¹⁸⁹ What is striking about this chapter are the gender norms described and subverted through G.H.’s role as an artist:

I act like a so-called successful person. Having done sculpture for an undetermined and intermittent period also gave me a past and a present that allowed others to situate me: people refer to me as someone who does sculptures that wouldn’t be bad if they were less amateurish. For a woman this reputation means a lot socially, and placed me, for others as for myself, in a region that is socially between women and men. Which granted me far more freedom to be a woman, since I didn’t have to take formal care to be one.¹⁹⁰

G.H. describes the freedom she gains from being an artist, in this case a sculptor is of particular interest as of the arts it is the most associated with men in the cultural imaginary. The artist as a social hybrid is a fascinating notion—one wonders if the same was true for men. Lispector then, perhaps, subtly references Virginia Woolf:

Perhaps this attitude or lack of attitude also came from never having had a husband or children, never needing, as they say, to break into or out of anything: I was continuously free. Being continuously free was also helped by my easy nature: I eat and

¹⁸⁹ Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 16.
¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 18.
Financial independence is central to G.H.’s freedom — she has more than a room of her own, she has an entire luxury apartment! She is also free from a family, which we find out later in the text, included an abortion.

G.H., before her process of depersonalization, seems to comfortably navigate an existence between male and female: “And as for men and women, what was I? I’ve always had an extremely warm admiration for masculine habits and ways, and I had an unurgent pleasure in being feminine, being feminine was also a gift.” G.H. does not really answer which she is, but she knows what she does not want to be: “Like somebody who follows with love the life of “whoredom,” and at least has the opposite of what she doesn’t know or want to have: the life of a nun.” Here we see Lispector’s commentary on “free love” versus the traditional whore/nun patriarchal dichotomy women have been subjected to throughout the ages. For 1964, the subtleties of the character G.H. are really quite remarkable:

I’m a woman of spirit. And with a spirited body. At the breakfast table I was framed by my white robe, my clean and well-sculpted face, and a simple body. I exuded the kind of goodness that comes from indulging one’s own pleasures and those of others. I ate delicately what was mine, and delicately wiped my mouth with the napkin.

G.H. lives a life of apparent hedonism, one that however was “a pretty replica.” Thus, at the end of this extraordinary chapter, G.H. asks, “This her, G.H. in the leather of her suitcases, was I: is it

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191 Ibid. 20-21.
192 Ibid. 21.
193 Ibid. 24.
194 Ibid. 24.
Towards the end of the novel, right before the chapter of the climactic act, G.H. alludes one last time to this “life:”

(I know one thing: if I reach the end of this story, I shall go, not tomorrow, but this very day, out to eat and dance at the “Top-Bambino,” I furiously need to have some fun and divert myself. Yes, I’ll definitely wear my new dress that flatters me and gives me color, I’ll call Carlos, Josefina, Antonio, I don't really remember which of the two of them I noticed wanted me or if both of them wanted me, I’ll eat crevettes à la whatever, and I don’t know because I’ll eat crevettes tonight, tonight will be my normal life resumed, the life of my common joy, for the rest of my days I’ll need my light, sweet and good-humored vulgarity, I need to forget, like everyone.)

Because I haven’t told everything.

The end of the story does not come, because she eats the white paste of the roach, language fails, and G.H. transcends into adoring life. She goes through a process of depersonalization and awareness which means that she will not return to her normal life. She will not eat crevettes. She will reach the uncommon joy of being.

Returning to Muraro’s essay, the first section we have been reading so far is surprisingly titled “sono solo una donna,” which seems odd for a feminist reading at first glance. Muraro quotes Lispector’s “confession” of seeking refuge in her fragility as a woman, of using it as an excuse: “‘Ogni volta che ho avuto bisogno, io mi ero discolpata grazie a quell’argomento, l’essere donna,’ ma ora la vecchia scusa non vale, perché ‘chiunque ha paura di vedere cos’è Dio.’” Muraro describes how at first she understood the excuse as an acceptable way to remove oneself from competing with men:

…I apprezzi perché, sebbene insufficiente, è una maniera di sottrarsi alla voglia di competere con l’uomo o alla reazione di essergli pareggiata. Sono solo una donna, mi

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195 Ibid. 24.
196 Ibid. 170.
197 Ibid. 66.
Herein lies one of the fundamental concepts of a major vein of Italian feminist thought, one which has its roots in a smoldering pamphlet titled “Sputiamo su Hegel,” by Carla Lonzi, considered by many the mother of Italian feminism, in which she argues against equality: “l’uguaglianza tra i sessi è la veste in cui si maschera oggi l’inferiorità della donna.” For Lonzi, the feminist fight for equality was misdirected because “l’uguaglianza è un principio giuridico (...) è quanto si offre ai colonizzati sul piano delle leggi e dei diritti. E quanto si impone loro sul piano della cultura. È il principio di base al quale l’egemone continua a condizionare il non-egemone.” Thus, she equates women’s equality with men not only with maintaining the status quo, but also to a cultural imposition and dominance akin to that of the relationship between colonizer/colonized. In other words, being equal to men is still playing their game by their rules.

For Luisa Muraro, Lispector’s concept of God, which is de-coupled from religion, —“I don’t know what I am calling God, but thus he may be called”— is a deliverance from having to defend her dignity as a woman vis-a-vis men, providing a newfound sense of freedom and

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198 Ibid. 66.

199 Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti*, (Milano: et al., 2010) 15.

200 Lonzi, 14-15.

201 However, this does not mean that Italian feminists never fought for or stopped fighting for equal social rights; throughout the 70’s and 80’s, Italian feminists practiced “double militancy,” meaning that they kept working with parties of the Left in order to achieve major goals such as the legalization of abortion in 1978, while at the same time developing a feminist consciousness that “took place in small women’s groups, in the form of the separatist feminist practice known as autocoscienza.” See: Teresa de Lauretis, “Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy,” in Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice ”, Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 6.
Thus, the simple phrase “sono solo una donna” becomes a powerful mantra and a symbol for Muraro of the undeniable fact of women’s ontological necessity, unbound by any comparison: “bisogno di essere, semplicemente essere.” The Passion According to G.H. is celebrated by Muraro and her students/fellow thinkers as “la prospettiva che si apre davanti a una donna nel momento in cui la sua ‘carenza’ la confronta non a qualche misura maschile ma alla misura divina della sua stessa infinità di desiderio.” This desire is, for Muraro, further characterized by Lispector towards the end of her novel: “così voglio, da me stessa e in me stessa, ritrovare la donna di tutte le donne.”

Lispector’s statement has great resonance for Muraro and il pensiero della differenza sessuale, for whom there is an indivisible, basic difference between human beings: one is born either male or female. Il pensiero della differenza sessuale has been dogged by the label essentialist and left in the dust of the onward marching “progress” narrative of Western/Anglo-American feminist theory due to what is interpreted as attempts to establish a universal “Woman.” In her introduction to her translation of The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective’s Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice, Teresa de Lauretis points to some of the criticisms of sexual difference, the main one being a lack of space for differences between

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203 Ibid. 66.


205 It also resonates with Diotima’s theory of “partire da sé.”
and within women, and a tendency to construct “a view of the female social subject that is still too closely modeled on the “monstrous” subject of philosophy and History.”206 By monstrous what is meant is the supposedly universal human that is in fact both neuter and male. De Lauretis defends sexual difference theory as being “a consciously political, materialist formulation of the specific difference of women in a particular sociohistorical location where, for instance, race or color has not been at issue; and where, if sexuality is now emerging as an issue, it is not merely against, but in part owing to, the very strength of this theory of sexual difference.”207 I find this formulation extremely unfortunate and troubling: race is only relevant in certain socio-historical locations? De Lauretis’s statement is myopic at best; it tries to justify the exclusion, but there really is no excuse. The reality is that racism pervaded feminism until black/women of color/Third World feminisms arose to address it.

What does the “woman of all women” mean? Let’s read the Lispector passage Muraro quotes from at greater length:

Depersonalization as the dismissal of useless individuality—losing everything one can lose and, even so, being. Little by little stripping, with an effort so mindful that one does not feel the pain, stripping, like getting rid of one’s own skin, one’s characteristics. Everything that characterizes me is just the way that I am most easily visible to others and how I end up being recognizable to myself. As there was the moment in which I saw that the roach is the roach of all roaches, so do I want to find in me the woman of all women.

Depersonalization as the great objectification of oneself. The greatest exteriorization one can reach. Whoever gets to oneself through depersonalization shall recognize the other in any disguise: the first step in relation to the other is finding inside oneself the man of all men. Every woman is the woman of all women, every man is the man of all men, and each of them could appear wherever man is


207 Ibid. 18.
judged. But only in immanence, because only a few reach the point of, in us, recognizing themselves. And then, by the simple presence of their existence, revealing ours.  

*Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*’s core tenet is that sexual difference is the one thing that a human being cannot lose; one is born either male or female. The great challenge is a how to represent this difference in discourse: “The question, then, for the feminist philosopher is how to rethink sexual difference within a dual conceptualization of being, ‘an absolute dual,’ in which both being-woman and being-man would be primary, originary forms.” For Muraro and her community, the concept of depersonalization is fundamental as both a linguistic and theoretic tool, and leads, in their reading of the above, to the basic understanding of embodiment of sexual difference. The passage does seem to suggest that the gendered, material body as object is what is left post-depersonalization. Yet, what Lispector writes about immanence seems to contradict this reading (or perhaps suggest something spiritual within/beyond the body?) — a common occurrence in a text that at times uses contradiction and opposition purposely, as alluded to in the address to the readers: “those who know that the approach, of whatever it may be, happens gradually and painstakingly—even passing through the opposite of what it approaches.”

Continuing with “Commento alla ‘Passione secondo G.H.,’” the second section is headed “lo splendore di avere un linguaggio.” In it Muraro discusses the circular nature of Lispector’s text: the first sentence of each chapter is the same as the last sentence of the previous chapter, including “— — — — — —”, the sentence which opens and closes the novel. She relates the

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dashes to something unsayable being gained, at the end of the human effort of language (though she does not mention that she “borrows” these terms from Lispector as we will see in the passage quoted below).\(^\text{210}\) The failure of language sets up a fall, and she quotes: “La caduta è ‘la perdita di tutto ciò che sia possibile perdere e pur così, essere.’”\(^\text{211}\) G.H. surrenders to falling, a surrender that is simultaneously a revelation, a choice, and a failure of language. Muraro describes the failure as exhausting the logic potential [of language] and ending up with the silence which reveals the presence/existence of being. She quotes Lispector which also merits quoting here:

> I have to the extent I designate—and this is the splendor of having a language. But I have much more to the extent I cannot designate. Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it—and the way I do not find it. (...) Language is my human effort. My destiny is to search and my destiny is to return empty-handed. But—I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can only be given to me though the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve.\(^\text{212}\)

Muraro reads the failure of language as the grand finale, which brings G.H. to an indescribable but extant reality (in other words, the unsayable). Lispector writes, at the very end, “Life just is for me, and I don’t understand what I’m saying. And so I adore it. — — — — — —”. It is, as she writes in Água viva: “o é da coisa.” Being. Life itself. Unlike Hegel, Muraro notes, in Lispector the absolute is not gained through the interminable work of mediation. In fact it is found in the act of giving up the word, in other words, the end of mediation. The dialectics of truth, she says, is between words and silence.

\(^{210}\) Ibid. 69.

\(^{211}\) Ibid. 68.

\(^{212}\) Ibid. 186.
Muraro then compares Lispector’s use of language to Wittgenstein, for whom “il punto d’arrivo della costruzione è di rivelare l’insostenibilità della costruzione stessa e la necessità di lasciarla cadere. Andare oltre sarebbe mentire. (...) Su ciò di cui non si può parlare, si deve tacere.”

Silence is the end for both Lispector and Wittgenstein, according to Muraro, but where they differ is: in Wittgenstein, the construction or ladder falls - an objective fall - whereas in Lispector the woman who climbed falls - a subjective fall into depersonalization. The subjective fall points to the fact that, as Lispector writes, “For the journey exists, and the journey is not simply a manner of going. We ourselves are the journey.” There must be personalization before depersonalization (as we saw above, G.H. describes “what” she was before the events, delimiting her form before losing it). In the novel, G.H. points to her culture as personalization, as providing the necessary climb to a point from whence to fall. Here Muraro starts to quote Lispector but then uses the literary trope of interrupting herself to move into a new section:

Interrompo la citazione a metà, ho bisogno di aprire un intervallo per capire e far capire come avviene, in Lispector, in un pensiero di donna, il passaggio da finito a infinito, di cui ho già detto che non ha necessità di religione.

It is as if Muraro is overwhelmed by the awesomness of having found un pensiero di donna that speaks of reaching the infinity through an end—the body. Indeed Lispector can be quite overwhelming…

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213 Muraro, 69.
214 Ibid. 69-70.
215 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 186.
216 Ibid. 70.
“Lungo i bracci della croce,” the following section, opens with “mentre studiavo il testo della Passione per presentarlo alle studentesse…” thus Muraro pulls us back from the brink of infinity into the personal, and into a narrative which is one of her main areas of research, that of female mysticism. Many critics have taken the mystical reading path, “the reference to the Gospels and the representation of the Passion, as well as the themes of a desire for infinity and for transfiguration present in the novel make a reading in terms of religion almost obligatory; specifically, given not only the thematic material as the terminology, the novel invites a reading in terms of a tradition of mysticism, that Benedito Nunes addresses with clarity and erudition.”

Lispector’s text has 33 chapters, the age of Jesus Christ at his death, which for Muraro is no coincidence: “Il testo è disseminato di richiami alla passione e morte di Gesù Cristo, a cominciare dal titolo. Più e più volte vediamo, nella storia delle donne, che l’uomo della croce si è presentato a fare da specchio all’esperienza femminile e a darle i mezzi per significarsi.”

In Lispector’s text, the word passion appears in the early pages relating to the protagonist’s initial fear of thinking, as Muraro quotes, “Come dunque inaugurare in me il pensiero? e, dato che soltanto il pensiero sarebbe in grado di salvarmi, ho paura della passione,” (“So how was I supposed to inaugurate thinking within me now? and maybe only

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217 Wasserman, 123.

218 Ibid. 70. She then tells the story of Virginia Maria de Leyva, known to most as “la monaca di Monza” from Manzoni’s romanzo storico, I promessi sposi. Muraro’s inclusion of de Leyva’s story is an important mini-project within her essay of highlighting the need for a re-reading and retelling of women’s stories left out of, or misrepresented by, the Historical record. Muraro adds Simone Weil and Edith Stein as contemporary continuations of this female genealogy, along with Lispector. As Cavarero will point out, Christ’s suffering on the cross is not a figure most women want or do identify with.
Thus, Muraro reads the scene in The Passion of G.H.’s entry into her maid’s room as a mystical ritual of sexual difference, a metaphor apt to describe Muraro and her students own reading of Lispector’s novel as a ritual entry into the language/philosophy of sexual difference. Muraro quotes Lispector: into the room, “chi vi entrasse si sarebbe trasformato in un ‘lei’ o un ‘lui’. Li era entrato un io cui il locale ha dato la dimensione di un lei.”220 Once inside, G.H. celebrates, according to Muraro, the sacrament of sexual difference - the eating of the roach: “la materia sacramentale, che nella messa è pane e vino, qui è una blatta, uno scarafaggio,” at first so disgusting to G.H. that she squashes it in the door of a wardrobe, but which transforms into something representative of difference. In the words of Lispector, “la sua unica differenza di vita è che doveva essere maschio o femmina. Io l’avevo pensata solamente come femmina, dato che ciò che è costretto in vita è femmina.”221 Here the word play in Italian works particularly beautifully, “vita” meaning both life and waist. This moment in Lispector’s text is the key, according to Muraro, to understanding the role of the cross in female thinking; it is not a transcendent truth, it is “l’interpretante di una condizione storica e del suo trascendimento. Nel crocefisso la donna schiacciata si specchia con il suo patimento e il suo bisogno infinito.”222

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220 Ibid. 72.

221 Ibid. 72.

222 Ibid. 73.
Thus, Lispector is both a key to and a continuation of female mystic tradition for Muraro. Like Cavarero, I do not find a figuration based on suffering appealing.

In broader terms, however, Lispector’s text is, as Muraro describes in the following section of her essay:

…un itinerario filosofico coerente per sé, sebbene l’origine della sua intima coerenza sia oltre le mie capacità di ricostruzione, riesco solo a intravvederla, e al tempo stesso rispondente ad un contesto storico, quello del pensiero contemporaneo.

Nel testo della Passione ho trovato, per me e per le studentesse che studiano filosofia con me, la nostra iniziazione al lavoro filosofico.223

Muraro adds a more overt political dimension to her reading of the novel by emphasizing its incredible hybridity as a hermetic text that is also a replicable response to contemporary philosophical thought and culture (in the sense that it serves as a model of thinking for women). G.H.’s passion is Muraro and as we will see shortly, Diotima’s, passion; Muraro weaves in and out of describing G.H’s trajectory and her own. At this climactic point in her narrative, she recounts the exact moment when the novel took on greater significance for her: a student used the novel’s opening theme of “losing a third leg” to describe her own experience of feeling reluctance to speak in front of the group. The third leg theme merits quoting in its entirety:

I lost something that was essential to me, and that no longer is. I no longer need it, as if I’d lost a third leg that up till then made it impossible for me to walk but that turned me into a stable tripod. I lost that third leg. And I went back to being a person I never was. I went back to having something I never had: just two legs. I know I can only walk with two legs. But I feel the useless absence of that third leg and it scares me, it was the leg that made me something findable by myself, and without even having to look for myself.224

223 Ibid. 73.

G.H. feels the phantom limb that was part of her identity but kept her from being free. Muraro recalls how her student’s relation of this passage to her own struggle made her recognize that she herself had learned and now taught philosophy as one learns to have a third leg - in other words, that traditional phallocentric philosophy (“il principio di autorganizzazione subordinata del pensiero femminile” as she also calls it) was the third leg that she and her students had to get rid of in order to be free to start anew, scary as that prospect may be.225

Lispector expands on the idea of the third leg, which can be read, as Muraro does, as a preconceived notion of identity: “until now finding myself was already having an idea of a person and fitting myself into it: I’d incarnate myself into this organized person, and didn’t even feel the great effort of construction that is living.”226 Muraro points to the relief that G.H. will feel once she realizes what an effort it was to maintain that third leg. The third leg can perhaps be read as the cultural ladder she had to climb in order to fall freely; without that third leg-ladder she may fall, unused to having two unstable legs, but soon she will learn the thrill of walking on her own two feet. As Muraro quotes, “stava crollando il mondo che non sopportava più di reggere,” which will lead to the great relief G.H. feels: “il mondo non dipendeva da me - questa era la fiducia cui ero arrivata: il mondo indipendeva da me…”227 This is a great reversal of what Muraro calls the parabola of Western philosophy from the pre-socratics to Hegel, for whom the point of arrival, the gain, was to conclude that the world was not independent from the thinking “I,” that being and thinking are inseparable.

225 Ibid. 74. Joyce Antigrace reads the third leg as a reversal of Lacan’s Lack.


227 Muraro, “Commento” 75.
Muraro finds freedom from her third leg in the text of *The Passion According to G.H.*, “l’itinerario di G.H., che io considero un estatto render conto dell’esperienza femminile per se stessa,” through no longer having to defend herself from “la segreta impressione che tutto sia finto.” Lispector’s text serves as a path for Muraro towards signifying women’s reality, which includes the experience of the space between thinking and being, which requires first and foremost female subjectivity. Once again she ties in a personal experience to the story, recalling when a member of *Diotima* stated that “una realtà che non si significa è niente,” and how thanks to Lispector she realized that for a woman a reality that cannot be represented is not nothing: “la realtà che non si significa, infatti, essendo ciò di cui una donna fa esperienza, diventa per lei fonte di conoscenza di sé e del mondo a partire da sé.” Thus Muraro’s conclusion that after Lispector’s seemingly enigmatic search for the “inexpressible,” the being that remains after losing everything one can lose and still be, is sexed, is a woman - the female subject: “la differenza sessuale non è fra le cose che una donna può perdere, in alcun modo.”

In her *commento* Muraro mentions the women’s feminist philosophy group Diotima. *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (1987) is the first collective publication by the community; 12 women are listed as authors. Muraro and Diotima’s many texts are not available in English translation; in my opinion, Lucia Re and Renate Holoub have written the

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228 Ibid. 77.
229 Ibid. 77.
230 Ibid. 78.
most thorough analyses of the writings of the *Diotima* group available in English. Re’s article “Diotima’s Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism” is part of a collection *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice* that positions itself as follows: “this volume is in English because the editors are aware that the Italian contribution to international debates remains at times marginal given that translations of most Italian feminist writings are not readily available.” French and Anglo-American feminist theory are by far the most disseminated, hence other feminist contexts are differentially marginalized. As the editors write in the introduction, they hope their volume “succeeds in revealing the intertwining of similarities and differences among various Western feminisms, as it moves the center out of France and the United States to Italy, where the awareness, implementation, and critique of French and Anglo-American feminist thought are signs of the international and dialogic nature of Italian feminism(s).” Here we see a reshuffling of Western feminist powers. As I exhorted in my introduction, I prefer to do away with the idea of a framework of center and margin when speaking of feminisms; inverting center and margins only inverts or regenerates displacement.

Re notes that “the concepts of author, authorship and authority are at the heart of Diotima’s research,” starting from their collective authorship dynamic. The name of the group is

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234 Though there is, as I have pointed out previously, much writing on Italian feminism including anthologies.

235 Ibid.
borrowed from Diotima of Mantinea, the woman who, according to Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*, taught Socrates about Love (the crux of Plato’s system of thought, for only through love can one contemplate the world of ideas). Diotima suggests, as Re describes “the entire male-dominated tradition of philosophical thought is in fact based on a misappropriation, the theft and presumably distortion of an originally word spoken by a woman who has been silenced.” The group’s project is therefore to give women back a philosophical voice. Re finds the Diotima project problematic for several reasons: first, she sees Muraro as positioning herself as a sort of priestess, opting to elect an entirely female philosophical genealogy for her community, drawing mostly from female mysticism, but, according to Re, without making reference to the Platonic tradition and its crucial role in the shaping of Western metaphysics. Re reads what Muraro and group practice as an exact counterpart of Plato’s theory, except love between women replaces love between men. However, in describing the origins of the group in *Diotima: Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, the group’s first publication, Muraro recounts how Cavarero invited her to participate in a philosophy discussion group led by a (male) professor, to which she responded she did not want to enter “nel cerchio dei pensieri omosessuali maschili per aiutarla a rinascere.” To which Cavarero responds, “se questa è la tua posizione, facciamo un cerchio di pensieri omosessuali femminili ma vivaddio facciamo filosofia.” So there actually was acknowledgement; I do think, along the lines of Re, that the divergence

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236 Re “Diotima’s Dilemmas,” 51.

237 Ibid. I will discuss this in greater detail in the following chapter on Cavarero.

238 Ibid. 54.

239 AA. VV. *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, 175-176.
between Muraro and Cavarero stems from what each considers “doing philosophy.” I propose that how they each read Lispector will also provide insight into their split.

Elaborating a language in order to think about sexual difference is the main task of the Diotima group, as proposed in *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale.* As one would expect after reading Muraro’s *commento,* the authors discuss Lispector in the first section, “La ‘passione’ della differenza,” of the opening essay-manifesto “La differenza sessuale: da scoprire e da produrre.” The essay opens with Luce Irigaray’s often quoted assertion: “La differenza sessuale rappresenta uno dei problemi o il problema che la nostra epoca ha da pensare.” The work of Irigaray was extremely influential on the group, though the politicization of the project of creating and restoring a female symbolic is an original feature of the Italians, starting with the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective of which Muraro was also a founding member. Diotima claims that no sexual difference theory exists because our Western culture, since the time of the Greeks, has not elaborated in knowledge “il fatto della sessuazione della specie umana,” particularly in areas of human thought where truth claims are made (namely, philosophy and science). According to the group, sexist dominance has gambled on the subordination of one sex as a practical solution to the problem of a human subject that is really not one but two. Hence, from “the incapacity of human thought to know itself in its duality as man/woman comes that the difference is lived as a form of passion.”

The thinkers claim, therefore, that the female passion of sexual difference can be found not in philosophy and science, but in art and literature, which constitute sources of female

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240 See Re, 58-59.

241 Ibid. 16. Translation mine.
knowledge. They list the following “great women’s literature of the 1900’s” as sources: *Three Lives* by Gertrude Stein, *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, *Menzogna e sortilegio* (*House of Lies*) by Elsa Morante, *More Women than Men* by Ivy Compton-Burnett, *The Quest for Christa T.* by Christa Wolf and *A paixão segundo G.H.* (*The Passion According to G.H.*) by Clarice Lispector. Of these exempla, Lispector is the only non-Western author, an obvious fact that is not mentioned. If all six of the above works are considered sources of women’s knowledge, what does this imply? I want to invoke Claudia de Lima Costa’s discussion of equivocation here:

> Equivocation signifies not only deception, misconception, but failure to understand that there are different understandings of different worlds. For example, class, race and ethnicity are categories that belong to the colonial division nature/culture. (...) They are, in other words, equivocations or equivocal categories: although they appear to be the same (i.e. to have the same meaning), in fact they may not be when signified by other communities.

The erasure of Lispector’s difference here is in and of itself equivocal - a Latin American woman writer is not the same as a Anglo-American/European woman writer; they come from, and write of, different worlds. For Costa, translation is the only way to ameliorate issues of equivocation: “Equivocation (in the sense of misinterpretation, error) calls for translation: it is from politically motivated and unfaithful translations that the pluralities of worlds are interconnected without becoming commensurate.” Hence my work here of cultural translation.

Diotima’s definition of the passion experienced by women is materialist at its very core: “é passione —nel senso classico del latino *pati*— che alla sostanza spirituale, o anima, accada qualcosa a causa del corpo. Così a ciascuno accade di essere donna o uomo a seconda del corpo

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242 Ibid. 16. The original lists the titles in Italian.
che ha. Ma sarebbe più giusto dire: che è.”

This framework of passion derives partially from Lispector’s text, but the formulation “che è” is particularly Lispectorian. It is the play on *ser/estar* that we have seen Lispector use since her letter to Lúcio Cardoso in order to evoke what it feels like to be a female body, not to have one as if it were a separate phenomenon. As recounted in her commentary on *The Passion*, Lispector’s novel is an initiation into feminist philosophy for Muraro and the group, and is now reconfigured into a more formal framework for *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*. The reading of the novel is brief, but notable:

> Quando il pensiero smette di pensarsi, dal suo lato femminile, innocente e superfluo, esso si vive come un urlo trattenuto per paura in un silenzio ormai insopportabile. Questa è la potente immagine che ne dà Clarice Lispector in *La passione secondo G.H.*: “Tutto si riassumeva ferocemente nel non cacciare mai il primo urlo — un primo grido scatena tutti gli altri, il primo grido, nascendo, scatena la vita, se urlassi io desterei migliaia di essere urlanti che avvierrebbero dai tetti un coro di urla e di orrore. Se urlassi, io scatenerei l’esistenza— l’esistenza di che? L’esistenza del mondo.”

As a group Diotima quotes a section of the novel not discussed in Muraro’s *commento*. It is a passage very fitting of a manifesto which is itself a type of “scream.” The first scream, according to the group, is also the end of the passion process, because the dilemma between “un pauroso silenzio e la disperata protesta fa sparire ogni gratuità di cui il pensiero aveva goduto nella donna. Ora lei sa l’accaduto e ne ha paura: se parla, sveglierà dal suo silenzio una sofferenza smisurata. Ma dalla sua stessa interna paura il pensiero apprende quale sarà la sua scelta.”

The awareness the passion process brings leaves no choice but to speak, scary as that prospect may be.

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245 Ibid. 16.
246 Ibid. 18.
247 Ibid. 18-19.
The complex task Diotima sets out is, through abandoning all binary oppositions (active/passive, superior/inferior, culture/nature, public/private, etc), to create new “forme simboliche” to represent the female experience, “forme che sono da scoprire ma anche da inventare:”

Il pensiero della differenza sessuale diventa allora inventore di mediazioni femminili. Diventa cioè pensiero politico che combatte l’isolamento della donna, tradizionalmente sola nel confinamento della famiglia e ancor più sola quando aspira ad integrarsi nella vita sociale, il suo termine di riferimento essendo costituito, in entrambi i casi, da quello che sente, vuole, giudica, l’uomo.  

The invention of a female symbolic structure is, for Diotima, their theoretical and political task. As Rosi Braidotti puts it, alluding to French and Anglo-American feminisms, “the Italian path to feminism has revealed a more political way to read sexual difference, filling the distance between the literary-symbolic project of some women, and the more socio-political project of others.” The group describes an initial separatist phase, a necessary step in order to study relationships between women in the absence of men. These experiments led to the concept of affidamento (entrustment), a relationship based on that of mother and daughter, where one woman has authority as mother/guide/mentor and there is mutual trust and exchange. This disparate dialectical relationship between women creates the conditions for “una esistenza ontologica non scissa.” The essay-manifesto ends with openness: that the symbolic fecundity of sexual difference remains a promise, an ongoing search for a way to “live together.” The foundational process, for men and women, according to Diotima, is “il sapersi sessuato da parte

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248 Ibid. 21.

249 Re, 59. She quotes Braidotti as having said the above in 1990, but does not give citation.

250 Diotima, Il pensiero, 21.
This process is understood as a passion, with the roots of its understanding in Lispector’s *The Passion According to G.H.*.

Luisa Muraro’s 1991 *L’ordine simbolico della madre* proceeds in her characteristic straightforward, first-person style, and frames her text in the preface as deriving from the political and philosophical work she has done with the women of the Libreria delle donne di Milano and Diotima. In her “Commento,” Muraro found a path to signifying women’s reality through the passion Lispector describes; with Diotima she experimented with the practice of entrustment. She now elaborates in *L’ordine simbolico della madre* the need for a maternal nexus of female subjectivity to support said reality:

> Io affermo che saper amare la madre fa ordine simbolico. Ed è questa, secondo me, l’affermazione implicita, ma sempre meno implicita, del movimento delle donne iniziato alla fine degli anni sessanta, la sua ragione e misura.

> Il femminismo ha prodotto una critica approfondita del patriarcato e delle molte complicità, filosofiche, religiose, letterarie, ecc. che hanno sostenuto il suo sistema di dominio. Ma quel lavoro di critica, pur vasto e accurato, sarà cancellato in una o due generazioni se non trova la sua affermazione. Solo questo può restituire alla società, *in primis* alle donne, la potenza simbolica racchiusa nella relazione femminile con la madre, e neutralizzata dal dominio maschile.\(^{252}\)

For Muraro, the mother is both real and symbolic, but the tools of philosophy are inadequate to represent women’s reality. The complicity between patriarchy and philosophy means that it is not enough to critique or, to use a known phrase, take down the master’s house using his tools; there must be a new house built, with new tools.\(^{253}\) Nor is desire enough - “il desiderio, di suo, non fa ordine simbolico.”\(^{254}\) How to build a philosophical practice that can lead to a female symbolic?

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\(^{251}\) Ibid. 37.


\(^{253}\) In contrast, Cavarero will write of using the masters’ tools maliciously.

For Muraro the first step is breaking out of the loop of “la logica della negazione della negazione.” Indeed, negating women’s negated place in patriarchal society is only a first step, albeit an important one in the right direction. The next step in Muraro’s passion, of (re)creating a female symbolic order, is to “rendere dicibile qualcosa che altrimenti non risulta essere.” In other words, the rendering the unsayable—the sign of Lispector. Indeed, in *L’ordine simbolico della madre*, Muraro includes a condensed version of her *commento*, her foundational transformational story, a practice she will do in many publications thereafter. First she briefly situates Lispector as “la grande narratrice sudamericana di origine ebreo russa,” though as vaguely South American. Then she quotes the third leg scene at length, the mythical scene the moment of awareness of the failure of philosophy to communicate women’s experience of—in—reality.

Muraro credits her understanding of women’s experience of “l’essere finto” to the end of *The Passion According to G.H.*, and quotes the final lines of the novel extensively. The joy that G.H. feels and which Muraro feels herself (“trovava in me echi profondi”) comes from the truth of knowing the real is not fake:

…che non dipende da noi per essere. Viene dall’essere sollevate, di colpo, dalla fatica di fingere, che faceva tutt’uno con il parlare, l’ascoltare, il camminare, l’amare, la vita insomma, e che sembrava fare tutt’uno con la vita e invece non è vero che la vita lo richieda anzi, e allora improvvisamente spunta la gioia incomparabile e riconoscente di riposare finalmente sull’essere che non ha bisogno di parole né di niente che non possiamo aggiungergli.

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256 Here are the lines in English, for reference: “The world independed on me - that was the trust I had reached: the world independed on me, and I am not understanding whatever it is I’m saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say. Since how could I speak without the word lying for me? how could I speak except timidly like this: life just is for me. Life just is for me, and I don’t understand what I’m saying. And so I adore it. — — — — — — “ Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 189.

Freedom from the third leg, from the effort of pretending that life is something it is not, from the unbearable fakeness of existing “in quotes”: as G.H. says, “life just is for me.” Realizing that the absolute unsayable real, that is how far Lispector takes us. But now how to express women’s truth?

The answer Muraro offers in *L’ordine simbolico della madre* is based on the symbolic authority of the mother, on which the practice of *affidamento* is built, from which a female symbolic can be generated. The cultural repression of our relationship with the mother, literally as well as symbolically, leads to a “rhetoric of uncertainty,” in other words, an uncertainty for the female speaker that words can really say what they mean. Muraro argues that it is from the mother that we learned to speak and thus she was the guarantor of language, hence the authority of the mother and of language are inseparable. This sense of authority is what is missing for a female symbolic to come into existence. Women are privileged by the fact of having been born women and thus have a more immediate connection with the mother through their sex. This bond means women have access to a paradoxical “free sense of authority.” With Diotima, Muraro argues in *Oltre l’uguaglianza* that the problem is not authority itself—it is necessary—but the degeneration of authority into power as coercive hierarchy and domination, characteristic of male-dominated political systems.258 Hence, the symbolic authority of the mother is based on power as—love?

*Affidamento* caused a fair amount of controversy. For Re, “the anti-egalitarianism of the concept runs counter to the most cherished feminist beliefs.”259 She calls Diotima “unbashedly

259 Re 59.
essentialist” for arguing that women are closer to the mother and more capable than men to grasp so-called free sense of authority. Re notes that the practice was called “harmful” by British thinker Christine Battersby, and criticized by Rossana Rossanda. Also critical, Teresa de Lauretis also points to a problematic ambiguity of Muraro/Diotma’s view of maternal authority, as it is not clear whether it is a metaphorical structure towards a female symbolic or the biological mother’s word. De Lauretis claims that Muraro effectively argues the latter, “thus regressively collapsing the symbolic mother into the real mother.” However, she defends the radical edge of the practice: “Each woman of each pair validates and valorizes the other within a frame of reference no longer patriarchal or male-designed, but made up of perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, values, and modes of relating historically expressed by women for women.”

Renate Holoub argues effectively that the mother in Muraro/Diotima’s writing is a metaphorical structure. In her affirmative reading, she writes that affidamento forms Diotima’s ethical backbone; she describes the practice as offering the possibility of individual and collective liberation by attempting to deal with the uneasy problem of relations of power among women. But what about the fact that the language the mother speaks is the phallogocentric language of the patriarchal culture she was born into? Holoub asks this same question, and her answer is that the relationship between women is of similarity not identity, hence women can be other/Other instead of the other of phallocratic culture. The unequal relation between two women

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260 Re, 62.
261 Re, 67.
activates the mother/daughter dynamic; the mother uses her power to mediate between the outside world and the daughter:

In the act of mediation, that which exists among women in spite of and because of their differences, that which is latent and similar in women precisely because they live a sexual difference, perhaps the remnants or traces of metaphoric of an ancient, buried, forgotten imaginary, rises to the surface and becomes powerfully activated, and the potentialities of a feminine subject begin to spark: a feminine language, culture, and symbolic can be created.\textsuperscript{263}

There must be recognition, explains Holoub, of each other and the differential between the two. It is about mediating and negotiating the unequal power between women to then work on the relations between the worlds of men and women. Holoub concludes that “we can learn from the pragmatics of Diotima’s way of being: not silencing what there is, but speaking it; not speaking feminist theory but performing liberating practices among women; and, ultimately, mediating rather than entrenching oppositions, essentialist or non-essentialist alike.” In her view, the pragmatics of Diotima, in which women are accountable to and for each other, represents “a feminist future in the making.”\textsuperscript{264}

I appreciate this highly ambitious project of attempting to figure out what a female politics and ethics could be; I challenge those who denigrate Diotma’s practices to come up with an alternative. I also understand the appeal of the mother as source of symbolic and the need to revive a positive mother/daughter relationship (I’m thinking of Freud here), but I remain skeptical of the essentialist elements and the power differential.

\textsuperscript{263} Renate Holoub, “Between the United States and Italy: Critical Reflections on Diotima’s Feminist/Feminine Ethics,” in Giovanna M. Jeffries, ed. Feminine Feminists, 247-248.

\textsuperscript{264} Holoub, 254.
Considering the importance of the figure of the mother in her work, it is odd that Muraro, writing solo or as part of Diotima, makes no mention of any of the passages from *The Passion According to G.H.* that are direct addresses to a “Mother” (Cavarero will). Over the course of the 20 years of prolific writing since *L’ordine simbolico della madre*, Luisa Muraro will include Lispector in almost all of her major publications—from just a sentence or mention to a range of longer or shorter readings. Lispector is ever present, almost obsessively so. Muraro’s writings have followed many of the themes seen since her *commento*: in particular, female mysticism, God, authority, the figure of the mother, and sexual difference are constant.

I want to end my study of Muraro with a very brief look at her latest essay dedicated fully to Clarice Lispector, “Une pensée-vie extra-philosophique” (2013), part of a collection of essays resulting from a colloquium on Lispector in Paris in 2011. Muraro, along with Rosi Braidotti, is included among European Lispectorphiles. Muraro’s is a reminiscent essay, full of nostalgia. She credits feminism for her discovery of Lispector: she found her as she was searching for women’s philosophical thinking to read and teach, turning to literature by women as a source of philosophical knowledge. Muraro narrates how Lispector’s works entered her personal library slowly, as they were translated, but she has continuously read and re-read just one, *The Passion*. She mentions owning a copy in original Portuguese for reference, and also mentions that she has recently read *Laços de familia, Água viva, A hora da estrela,* and *A descoberta do mundo.* Muraro states that in Lispector, she never found feminist revolt, but the more she read her, she found the free sense of her difference as a woman.\(^\text{265}\) Muraro retraces the steps of her first

encounter with Lispector, basically replaying her *comentário*. Unlike in the original commentary, here quotations from Lispector’s text are also in original Portuguese in footnotes. Most notable are Muraro’s references to other writings on Lispector, including Cixous, Peixoto, Gotlib, making this her most “academic” text on Lispector.

Muraro admits to “using” Lispector, writing that Diotima “used” the third leg theme as a “programme philosophique.” She writes that she is conscious of the fact that she used Lispector for her feminist goals, but that she did not interpret - she protests those who say that “j’avais donné une interprétation féministe de son oeuvre.” Muraro insists that she made feminist use of Lispector to nourish herself and her students, and —in a Cixousian vein—that Lispector “authorized” her and her students to “use” her, quoting Lispector: “And He not only allows us, but He needs to be used, being used is a way of being understood.” Lispector has truly God-like dimensions for Muraro. She then retraces Diotima’s reading of *The Passion*, performing a synthesis of her Lispector readings to date. Like Cixous, Muraro’s adoration for Lispector is vast:

*La Passion selon G.H.* est le récit d’une experience d’écriture qui, en se dépouillant des mediations littéraires, parvient à coïncider avec la vie ed devient expérience d’être, et de l’être. L’originalité et la puissance de ce récit nous laisse stupéfaits.

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266 Ibid. 182.


We shall be the living matter revealing itself directly, ignorant of word, surpassing thought which is always grotesque.

—Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

Adriana Cavarero (1947) is the most internationally well known and acclaimed Italian feminist philosopher today.\(^{269}\) She is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Verona, and was a co-founder of the women’s philosophical community Diotima, in which she participated until 1990.\(^{270}\) The reasons of this schism are important to those of us, as Lucia Re writes, who wish to know more about the specific nature and complexities of Italian feminist thought and political practices.\(^{271}\) Hence, in this chapter I follow the evolution of Cavarero’s theories on


\(^{270}\) Ibid.

feminist language and subjectivity, and hope to provide insight into her split from the Luisa Muraro helmed Diotima group, by following the filo di Clarice in her work; I want to understand why she ends up acclaimed internationally.

Initially, Cavarero’s reading of Lispector seems in line with Luisa Muraro’s, yet over time, their readings revealingly diverge in important ways. In the pages that follow I will be reading: Nonostante Platone (1990) which provides the backbone of her early readings; “La passione della differenza” (1995), a transition in both her reading of Lispector and her theoretical thinking; “Who Engenders Politics?” (2002) to wrap up a comparison with Muraro. Lispector will finally be directly quoted again in A più voci. Filosofia dell’espressione vocale (2003), in which Cavarero builds on the narratable self with a theory based on the “vocal phenomenology of uniqueness” and discusses Lispector’s work in relation to Cixous. I included my reading of this last text at the end of Chapter One. Throughout my discussion, I strive to understand Cavarero’s readings of Lispector against the yarn, decolonially.

Before moving into Adriana Cavarero’s theoretical writings, I would like to take a moment to discuss her 1999 anthology Le filosofie femministe, co-edited with Franco Restiano. As discussed in previous chapters, Hemmings has suggested:

…despite a rhetorical insistence on multiple feminisms, Western feminist trajectories emerge as startlingly singular. In particular, I am critical of an insistent narrative that sees the development of feminist thought as a relentless march of progress or loss. This dominant approach oversimplifies the complex history of Western feminisms, fixes writers and perspectives within a particular decade, and repeatedly (and

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erroneously) positions poststructuralist feminists as ‘the first’ to challenge the category ‘woman’ as the subject and object of feminist knowledge.\footnote{Clare Hemmings, “Telling Feminist Stories,” \textit{Feminist Theory}, vol6(2) 2005, 115.}

Furthermore, Hemmings points to a specifically Anglo-American trajectory that forces both European and non-Western feminist theorists to “reposition themselves in line with the former’s logic, or to depict themselves as critical or transcendent, but nevertheless as responsive.”\footnote{Ibid. Italics in original.} As we saw with Luisa Muraro, there is a tendency, while critiquing it, to reconstitute the Anglo-American narrative. Cavarero’s anthology is another example; the table of contents reveals an insertion of Italian feminism into the Western narrative that leaves mostly untouched the dominant story of feminism as Anglo-American. The section titles are as follows: “Femminismo di prima ondata e riflusso (1792-1960),” which includes Simone de Beauvoir and A. M. Kollontai along with Anglo-Americans; “Seconda ondata: il femminismo radicale (1968-1980),” completely Anglo-American; “L’alternativa francese: la teoria della differenza (1974-1985),” made up of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva; “Il femminismo italiano (1970-1991),” which includes Carla Lonzi, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero; and finally “Il femminismo nell’università: sessualità e identità in discussione (1980-2002),” consisting of a mix of Anglo-American and Continental thinkers, most of whom work and teach in the United States.

This last section is particularly interesting in that it indicates a phase of “institutionalized” or academic feminist theory, though said phase overlaps with the previous categories. Primacy is given to where they teach or work, with only some countries of origin
randomly indicated in the introductory notes before each author’s selected piece. As Restiano writes in his introduction in the section titled “La questione del soggetto e dell’identità (1985-1998)”:

È in questo quadro che avviene l’“accademizzazione” del pensiero femminista, il quale si configura gradualmente come attività di ricerca e di riflessione non collegata a un movimento di donne politicamente organizzato, come era stato negli anni settanta. Le pensatrici alle quali faremo cenno sono generalmente docenti universitarie, impegnate quasi esclusivamente in un lavoro di ricerca accademico, in costante contatto grazie ai frequenti incontri organizzati nei vari atenei statunitensi e in quelli del mondo occidentale.276

Monique Wittig, for example, is included under the rubric of French feminism in the introduction, yet her work is not catalogued under the French feminism section because the chosen piece is on lesbianism; she is instead described as “transferred to America to teach at the University of Arizona” and as such is transferred to a different categorization and place on the feminist timeline.277 Thus, due to the nature of the chosen subject-matter and her “new” location, Wittig transcends her fellow frenchwomen who have the same problem we encountered with Muraro, that of being “stuck” in a certain decade/time period or rubric due to the lack of “progress” in her work, as if French and Italian feminist thought ended in 1991. Teresa de Lauretis is specifically described as transferred from Italy to the United States in the 1960’s to pursue her academic career.278 Rosi Braidotti is likewise described in the introduction as “italiana trasferitasi presto all’estero e da molti anni docente all’Università di Utrecht,” but no mention is

276 Ibid. 64-65. He also notes that these academic thinkers are unfettered by practical issues of yore relating to an organized political struggle “che non c’è.” I would hardly agree that there is no longer a political struggle to be had in the women’s movement, and would also argue that these thinkers consider their work politically relevant.


278 Ibid. 205.
made of her nationality in the introductory note to the selected passages from her work, there she is “molto presente nel dibattito teorico con le femministe italiane oltre con quelle statunitensi.”

Finally, in the introductory notes to her own text, Cavarero is described as “negli ultimi anni le sue tematiche si sonno avvicinate a quelle dei più recenti sviluppi teorici del femminismo (de Lauretis, Braidotti, Butler, Battersby).” Thus there is a desire and an attempt to transcend the boundaries of being left behind by the so-called progress of feminist theory; in telling her own story, Cavarero straddles originating from and belonging to the Italian scene while also inserting her name into a contemporary “global” genealogy of “progressive” peers. Luisa Muraro is revealingly not inserted into this group: her story is told as “l’autrice ha sviluppato in questa e in altre nuove direzioni le sue ricerche teoriche negli anni successivi,” (the reference being to L’ordine simbolico della madre), though clearly her work had not developed in the “correct” direction that would categorize her with the “academic” feminists, even though she remains a Professor at the University of Verona and has published more frequently to date than Cavarero herself. Thus, we see how the story of Cavarero’s international renown is partially self-constructed and propagated, and how she distances herself subtly from Muraro by also grouping herself with the most recent Anglo-American academic theoretical feminist vanguard (which, if we recall from Chapter Two, Muraro calls “trendy,” asserting her position as underdog).

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279 Ibid. 66 and 209 respectively.

280 Ibid. 192.

281 Ibid. 190.

282 Though she does not go so far as to include her work in that category in the anthology, for example, a passage from Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti.
Cavarero’s texts have been translated into English, granting them much further reach, which is not the case with Muraro.

As Braidotti herself and others have noted, “the dominance of this story thus not only stifles the particularities of different trajectories, but also sidelines the multiple differences within both Anglo-American and Continental feminist thought in the process.”283 Besides a fuller depiction of the Anglo-American and continental story itself, what is jarringly missing from Le filosofie femministe are non-Western perspectives. Mention is made of “tematiche ‘etniche’” in the introduction, under the heading “Internazionalizzazione e accademizzazione del femminismo,” though no thinkers are listed, and the internationalization seems to be just a reshuffling of Anglo-American and Continental thinkers amongst each other’s institutions. According to the editors, initially discussions of said ethnic minorities were limited to the United States, though “da qualche anno investono molti altri paesi nei quali le minoranze etniche sono presenti in misura crescente nella vita sociale e culturale.”284 Under the rubric “Il femminismo nero ed etnico” we are given a brief history of black feminism in the United States, with names named, yet none of these authors are given a space in the anthology for their work. As for the “other” ethnic minorities, we are treated to a single line, “fra le esponenti del dibattito femminista di altre minoranze etniche, latino-americane soprattutto, ricordiamo Gloria Anzaldúa e Rosario Morales.”285

284 Cavarero and Restiano, 56.
285 Ibid. 61.
Cavarero and Restiano have the laudable desire and goal to tell a story of feminist thinking, “Il pensiero femminista. Una storia possibile,” as Restiano titles his introduction; within the story they chose to tell, however, is an emphasis placed on the dominant strain of Anglo-American and Continental (namely, French and Italian) feminist thinking, with a special emphasis on garnering more space “in the center” for Italian thinking. Understandably given the publishing context a lot of space is given to Italian feminism, but the preoccupation with vindicating Italian thought reveals insecurity in a tone that smacks of superiority: “in Italia il femminismo nasce contemporaneamente a quello dei paesi più avanzati su piano economico, sociale e politico, e si afferma in conseguenza di un distacco dai vari movimenti politici organizzati delle sinistre, vecchie e nuove.” Due to this type of thinking I felt compelled to include space for Latin American feminisms in Chapter One of this project. It is not my aim to demonize Cavarero and Restiano for their anthology, they are pretty clear that they are telling a story not any sort of definitive story, but what is left out speaks as loudly as what is included. From my Transloca, decolonial standpoint either more justification was needed for the exclusion of work by non-Western writers, or more emphasis on stating very clearly that this is an Anglo-American and Continental anthology only. The anthology remains a dated archival relic of how the dominant Western feminist canon formed and affirmed itself, and excluded Others.

Adriana Cavarero’s philosophical trajectory may help us understand the lacunas in her anthology. Her early work deals primarily with issues of language; later, it turns to issues of identity. Her writing treats philosophical issues over practical. This may be one of the primary reasons for her split from Diotima: a desire to work on more purely theoretical topics while

286 Ibid. 69.
Muraro and the group continued to combine theoretical work with political social practices. Within the realm of their theoretical divergence, let us now return to my chosen line of inquiry, the part played by Clarice Lispector in this story of Italian feminist thinking.

Cavarero performs her full solo reading of Lispector in her 1990 book *Nonostante Platone*, a feminist deconstruction of the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy that uses sexual difference as a lens. Cavarero’s points of departure are four central figures in Greek mythology, as they appear in Plato: Penelope, the Thracian maidservant, Demeter, and Diotima. She enters into a dialogue with Plato in order to “deconstruct the text of Western philosophy, to work on and against its language, and to engage in a continuing dialogue with its exponents, while at the same time continuing to valorize the originality and strength of women’s thought and discourse.” For example, in the section on Demeter, Cavarero describes the “masculine symbolic horizon” as feeding on dualisms: “woman/birth and man/death, body and thought. But these are uneasy dualisms. They are not bipolar opposites based on equality. For the masculine pole controls the other one; that is the universalization of one sex reduces the other to a function, and throws all the negative categories upon it.” Maintaining the Diotima line on equality (namely, that equality with men is not a goal), she then proceeds to take apart the myth to first prove the existence of a maternal genealogy - “the maternal continuum” - and second to show how birth and generation are a female realm which reveals a female subjectivity:

Indeed universal “Man” is never born and never lives. Instead, individual persons are born and live their lives gendered in difference as either man or woman. But every human born, male or female, is always born of a woman, who was born of a woman, who, in turn, was born of another woman, and so on, in an

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287 Re, 57.
endless backward movement toward our origins. This maternal continuum delineates the feminine root of every human being. (...) Far from being a “coming from nothing,” birth is a coming from a mother.

And right here lies the deepest meaning of the feminine “secret” of life, which archaic cultures attribute to the Great Mother: to generate is an exclusively female experience, but it is not an automatic and obligatory process where women are mere vehicles. To put it in more modern terms, the myth of Demeter reveals a sovereign figure of female subjectivity who decided, in the concrete singularity of every woman, whether or not to generate.288

By revealing the female power of generation, she reverses the matricide committed by Plato in the Symposium, in which he ventriloquizes Diotima to affirm her own erasure and appropriates the language of birth and procreation for phallocentric philosophy.

The fact that Cavarero includes a reading of Lispector’s *The Passion According to G.H.* in the final pages of her groundbreaking book is a powerful statement of the Brazilian author’s impact. For Cavarero, Lispector “recounts a process of depersonalization that allows her to rediscover an innocent sense of belonging to “the forbidden weft of life”.289 The process of depersonalization that conserves a gendered foundation plays a crucial role in the connection with the maternal continuum as described by Cavarero in her book, and is in line with what Muraro discusses in her *commento*: “la differenza sessuale non è fra le cose che una donna può perdere, in alcun modo.”290 In Cavarero’s reading, depersonalization “brings life itself to the fore as a primitive and “prelogical” phenomenon to which all those living and of woman born really belong” and thereby relegates death to the background.291 Indeed, one of Cavarero’s principal

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289 Ibid. 114.


291 Ibid. 113-114.
goals throughout *In Spite of Plato* is to evidence that death is the central category on which the whole edifice of traditional phallocentric philosophy is based. The divestment from death, for Cavarero, abolishes the centrality of nothingness: “There can be no nothingness if living human creatures turn their eyes away from their end, and look instead toward the infinite, embodied origin from whence they come.”\(^{292}\) Thus, Cavarero strings together a continuum held in place by birth, and suggests that “maternal power is the necessary site of the link with our boundless pre-human origins.”\(^{293}\) Death, according to this anti-nihilist reading, is just a metamorphosis one can expect and need not fear. As we also saw in Muraro’s *L’ordine simbolico della madre*, the nihilistic “l’essere finto” experienced by women was freed by depersonalization and the breakdown of language.

Cavarero describes G.H. as a middle-class woman who “lives a sort of mystical experience, the adventure of a soul, in the enclosed space of her room, and happens to experience the “absence” of the self that allows divine, primeval life to emerge. ‘I was about to face within myself the degree of living so originary that it bordered on the inanimate.’”\(^{294}\) The experience actually takes place in Janair the maid’s room, as I discussed at length in both the Cixous and Muraro chapters; I will return to the intersection of race and gender shortly. Cavarero is intent on displacing philosophy’s so-called universal “Man” focused death with a female symbolic based on birth and a maternal continuum. She finds a process to accomplish this displacement in *The Passion According to G.H.*, one which involves the abandonment of what she calls “humanized life:” “namely the personal identity consisting of the unified organization of meaning that inserts

\(^{292}\) Ibid. 114.

\(^{293}\) Ibid. 114.

\(^{294}\) Ibid. 114-115.
her [G.H] into a codified system where she has a face, a name, a role, a secondary social position as a woman.” This reference to a secondary social position is never said outright in Lispector’s novel, it is implied and read as such by feminist thinkers such as Muraro, Cavarero, and as we shall see in the following chapter, Rosi Braidotti.

In Cavarero’s reading, we find great emphasis placed on the cockroach as a sort of anti-death talisman, a creature that has been around since the dawn of time and keeps surviving. Like Muraro, Cavarero gives a lot of weight to Lispector’s characterization of the cockroach as a female as evidence of sexual difference, quoting the same section of the original text, “Its only differentiation in life is that it has to be either male or female. I had been thinking of it only as a female since whatever is caved at the middle must be female.” Unlike Muraro, however, Cavarero picks up on several moments in the novel where a “Mother” is addressed directly:

As the text progresses, the importance of the female gender attributed to the cockroach becomes more and more manifest, since pregnancy and motherhood are openly indicated as the crucial point where individual life is generated via the feminine from impersonal life, from the neutrality that sustains and surpasses it. Indeed, the narration stylistically shifts into direct speech addressed to the mother, where the repeated invocation “Mother” marks the writer’s words as those of a daughter to her mother.

Hence, we begin to see how Cavarero takes her reading in a different direction than Muraro’s; Cavarero connects the primacy of sexual difference with a death-defying maternal continuum. A maternal symbolic order is, as we have seen, also central to Muraro’s thinking and her readings

295 Ibid. 115.

296 Ibid. 116-117. This English translation in Cavarero of the original text is not great- the more recent Novey translation from New Directions, 2012, is better: “I had only thought of it as female, since things crushed at the waist are female,” page 92.

297 Ibid. 117. Unfortunately Cavarero does not include a reading of the abortion in the text, see Braidotti in Chapter Four XXX.
of Lispector, however, her path takes her through female mysticism and a call for maternal authority as a foundation for a female symbolic. It seems the practice of authority through affidamento may be a source of Cavarero and Muraro’s tensions.

The nullification of the “I” is reached through depersonalization, which in turn leads to the connection to a maternal continuum similar to Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born*:

…”that sexed maternal root that links every “I” to impersonal life itself, every living being to his or her beginning in an origin that has innocently generated every beginning for all time. Precisely what is “crushed in life is female,” for every living individual comes from a mother and consequently every woman contains the continuum of her past and future within her present: “her fifteen million daughters, from that time down to myself.””

As we saw in the previous chapter, for Muraro the “crushed waist” is a crucial phrase in understanding Lispector as a key to and a continuation of the female mystic tradition and women’s identification with the crucifixion of Christ. Cavarero instead discovers an elegant folding of past, present and future in every woman through the infinite maternal continuum, a philosophical intuition of the physical biological reality of most species: a female’s mitochondrial DNA passes from mother to offspring unchanged, meaning a maternal genealogy can be traced genetically; females are also born with ovaries filled with ova, carrying the mitochondrial DNA, the past and potential future always within the present body. This reality is non-deterministic in any way.

Cavarero turns our gaze backward rather than forward, in defiance of the traditional male “obsession with transcending the individuality of mortal life.” This backward gaze inevitably

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299 Ibid.
leads one to encounter the figure of the mother, bringing female sexual difference into sharp focus; thus, Cavarero argues, the mother is “in many ways a threshold,” and “the link that leads from the individual to the ‘impersonal,’ to the infinite life described by Lispector, of which the ‘I’ constitutes a temporary form.”\textsuperscript{300} The temporality of the individual is contrasted with the mother as a conduit, a link “within the human species to infinite life, carrying the embodied memory of the human and prehuman within her. As Lispector says, at the time when the fifteen million daughters, of whom she herself is a daughter, signal to her the absolute importance of her sex: ‘I had always been in life, it mattered little that it was not I properly speaking, not the thing I that I customarily call ‘I.’ I have always been in life.’”\textsuperscript{301} In a similar reading of \textit{The Passion} with \textit{The Hour of the Star}, Tace Hedrick sees a constant search for ways to express the generative nature of being-female, which is beyond language.\textsuperscript{302}

Lucia Re has noted that birth is the “first and foremost figure of community for Cavarero. (...) While Muraro and the rest of Diotima group share with Cavarero the fundamental notion of a maternally-oriented community, however, Diotima and Cavarero part ways in the understanding of what maternal authority should be.”\textsuperscript{303} Unlike Diotima and Luisa Muraro’s solo writings, Cavarero does not discuss maternal authority as the basis of a female symbolic; instead, she focuses on “a bond which valorizes the fact of being of the same sex.” In Re’s reading, Cavarero does not take the “unabashedly essentialist” step that Diotima and Muraro, we recall, is to argue that women are inherently closer to the mother, and are therefore more capable than men

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid. 117-118.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid. 119.
\textsuperscript{302} Hedrick, 43.
\textsuperscript{303} Lucia Re, “Diotima’s Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism,” 65.
of grasping the free sense of authority. Muraro’s adoption of Simone Weil’s notion of “free obedience” is, as Re describes, dangerously close to the logic of totalitarianism, and I agree. Re then clarifies that Diotima is of course far from subscribing to a totalitarian discourse, but in practice, what is at stake is not “a literal indebtedness to one’s own mother, but rather Muraro’s own real and literal authority within Diotima.” Therefore there seems to be, in Re’s interpretation, a cult of personality formed around Muraro that problematizes Diotima’s view of maternal authority and endangers its practices. The group itself seems to find obedience to Muraro unproblematic, as one member is quoted as saying “it is because of the structuring presence of female authority, of Luisa’s authority, that the condition lived by Diotima can be called that of a female order.” The departure of members, not limited to Cavarero, perhaps says otherwise.

The problematic supposed Mother-Muraro dynamic aside, theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis have criticized Diotima and Muraro, in particular Muraro’s *L’ordine simbolico della madre*, for the ambiguity inherent in the usage of the figure of the mother as authority, as “it is not clear whether maternal authority is to be understood as a metaphorical structure and venue for the (re)creation of a female symbolic, or as a literal reliance on the biographical mother’s word.” De Lauretis claims that Muraro’s *L’ordine simbolico della madre* effectively argues the

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304 Ibid. 62.

305 Ibid.

306 Rebecca West also mentions this public polemic: “Muraro’s position as current sole leader has subsequently been consolidated to such an extent that there have been public debates in print about the dangers of her growing power, which is interesting since they work on power and authority as a group.” Re and West seem to point to a sort of cult of personality surrounding Mother-Muraro. See “The Potential of Authority in Contemporary Italian Culture: Thinking and Writing Against Power,” *Italian Culture*, 17:1, pp. 86-87.
latter, thus regressively collapsing the symbolic mother into the real mother.”

In Cavarero there is no such collapsing, as there is no attempt to connect the maternal continuum with a theory of maternal authority. Instead, Cavarero builds a female symbolic that supposedly diffuses issues of power by shifting emphasis away from death, thus leaving all beings, male and female of woman born, connected with the infinite continuum of life. Perhaps this is a reason why, according to Re, Muraro has openly criticized Cavarero as being too moderate and for not accepting the permanent need for female communities. In my reading, while Cavarero’s theories place sexual difference at their core, they are in a way more theoretically pragmatic, leaving space for inclusiveness, but are practically less pragmatic as she does not suggest any praxis related to a mother continuum.

Following a reverse evolutionary path, Cavarero’s argument in In Spite of Plato takes us back to the prehuman through the maternal, connecting the animal realm, even the simplest originary organisms, symbolically to the feminine as “a feminine expression of the divine.” The author then quotes Lispector once more, this time not from The Passion According to G.H., but from Legami familiari (Family Ties), a move which singles her out from Muraro and Braidotti, who only obsessively quote The Passion in their work, and places her closer to Cixous, who read and commented Lispector’s oeuvre extensively. At the end of her reading of Lispector, which is simultaneously the end of In Spite of Plato, Cavarero concludes that “in the embrace of our infinite origin, Western philosophy can mark an abrupt shift of its famous destiny. Indeed, the god who loves to be called ‘thought of thoughts’ disappears irremediably in the face of the kind

307 Ibid. 68.

of divinity that splendidly knows nothing about self or other, and lives simply because it has been born.”

Although we see how Cavarero and Muraro’s paths begin to diverge through their readings of Lispector in books published at around the same time, *Nonostante Platone* and *L’ordine simbolico della madre*, Cavarero still quotes from Muraro’s seminal “Commento alla Passione secondo G.H.” in her notes, specifically, the passage describing Lispector’s novel as “extra-philosophical,” their relationship seeming less contentious, at this point, than Re’s article would suggest.

Together, Muraro, Cavarero and the Diotima community discovered possible paths towards a new female subjectivity through reading Lispector; we can follow their diverging concerns and stories in their subsequent readings of the Brazilian author. Similar to Muraro’s *commento*, Cavarero’s longest reading of *The Passion According to G.H.* appears in an article, “La passione della differenza,” published in *Storia delle passioni* (1995). In the article, the author focuses on issues of female identity and image. First, she moves through a brief history of how opposing identities are assigned to men and women based on the dichotomies of male/reason and female/passion, founded on androcentric logic which is “troppo nota alla cultural contemporanea per dover essere qui esaminata nelle pieghe del dettaglio e nelle precise argomentazioni della critica femminista. Un rapido accenno ai suoi snodi fondamentali potrà comunque risultare proficuo per il tema che ci sta al cuore.” Cavarero frames her retelling of

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309 Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, 119-120.
310 Ibid. 128.
recent feminist history as one that is already well-known, inserting herself into the framework in
a footnote, noting the work of Irigaray as well as her own as part of a genealogy of anti humanist
feminist critics.\textsuperscript{313} Cavarero then reviews women’s historical suffering at the hands of an image
of the self not produced by the self, a “female” gendered identity not produced by women from
and for themselves. She concludes that this produces a desire in women to find their own image.

Cavarero then moves to another historical site of the intersection of women’s bodies,
images and identity: female mysticism.\textsuperscript{314} Female mysticism and the self-identification of
women with Christ on the cross entered the Western imaginary in the middle ages. It is, for
Cavarero, “ormai oggetto di una sconfinata letteratura specialistica di grande interesse.”\textsuperscript{315} She
values female mysticism as an important area of study, but qualifies it as \textit{niche}, providing us with
a clue as to why someone like Muraro, whose work has a major investment in female mysticism
as genealogy and potential political model, is less valued and given less international attention.
Primacy seems to be given within the dominant Western narrative of feminist theory and
thinking to philosophy and arguments which dialogue with male thinkers (Derrida, Deleuze,
Foucault etc.) than those which bypass male thinkers and phallocentric history in favor of a more
purely female genealogy. I believe there is also a certain fear or plain dislike of mysticism as
being too related to religion. I agree with Cavarero that female mysticism is an interesting area of
study, and take no issue with Muraro’s choice of searching for female genealogies, however,
female mysticism tends to be Eurocentric (unless one includes figures such as Sor Juana de la
Cruz) and limiting as both a theory and a practice. I would be more interested in reading about

\textsuperscript{313} Ibid. 283-284.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid. 286.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid. 291. Cavarero cites a long list of work dedicated to female mystics and mysticism in a footnote.
female mysticism as women’s searches for spirituality outside of patriarchal monotheistic religions.

Cavarero valorizes female mysticism by including it in her narrative, while at the same time using the issues arising from its discussion as a springboard to further investigation. Her coverage of the female mystic tradition echoes Luisa Muararo’s “sono solo una donna” line of thought:

Nell’ordine simbolico che le mistiche mettono in atto, invece, l’immagine scelta dalla devota, per il suo incoercibile desiderio di identificazione, è appunto l’immagine dell’Altro (divino) che taglia fuori l’altro (sesso) da qualsiasi intervento o intromissione. Da un’alterità rapportata al finito si passa così a un’alterità che abita l’infinito. (…) L’intero processo di identificazione, anche se nei suoi esisti fusioni, viene a svolgersi in un orizzonte che è incentrato sulla differenza sessuale di segno femminile. Di modo che la mistica, per quanto ‘esca’ dai limiti del suo corpo, non esce mai dal segno della sua sessuazione. 316

We see, however, how Cavarero’s account of the experience of female mystics does not cross over into the personal as it did with Luisa Muraro. Cavarero does not identify with female mysticism and does not convey her reading of the female mystic tradition as something which was transcendent for her personally and politically. Instead, the section on female mysticism can be read as background for her analysis of Clarice Lispector’s The Passion According to G.H.. Lispector’s novel is, for Cavarero, a continuation of the themes she teased out in her discussion of the female mystic tradition: “possiamo infatti notare come eccesso, annichilamento e trasgressione dell’ordine dato siano presenti anche nella scrittura mistica di alcune narratrici a noi contemporanee.”317

317 Ibid. 296.
For Cavarero, the Brazilian author transports the experience of the Passion of Christ to the banalities of the modern world. Unlike in *In Spite of Plato*, here Cavarero pays slightly more attention to the details regarding class and race in her description of G.H., whose initials on luxury leather luggage symbolize the typical pleasant and banal life of an emancipated white woman, one who fits into the “organization” of society and the world, as Lispector puts it. G.H.’s itinerary is, in Cavarero’s reading, a progressive “uscita dal sistema del suo Io e dal sistema, sociale e linguistico, che lo definisce. Ciò avviene attraverso un singolare processo interiore di disorganizzazione che porta infine la protagonista ad esperire il proprio annichilamento per dissolversi nella dimensione cosmica e primaria di ‘una carne infinita.’”\(^\text{318}\) It is this annihilation of the self and the dissolution into the infinite divine which links Lispector to the mystic tradition for Cavarero, a process which is “deindividualizzante e disumanizzante e approda appunto ad un’immensa e vibrante materia viva.”\(^\text{319}\) It will be these aspects of de-individualization and de-humanization that Cavarero will return to as problematic to a greater philosophy of sexual difference at the end of her reading.

The bulk of the reading is centered on three moments relating to the use of images in the Lispectoran text, whose complexity, Cavarero confesses, cannot be adequately analyzed in the space of her article. The first image is that of G.H. as emancipated woman, a sculptor by profession, a role which situates her “in un’area socialmente intermedia fra uomo e donna.”\(^\text{320}\) This in-between-ness is a zone occupied by contemporary women according to Cavarero, a zone which requires of women to be like men, despite being women. The effort of assimilating to a

\(^{318}\) Ibid. 297.

\(^{319}\) Ibid. 298.

\(^{320}\) Ibid. 298.
false image, one which is not one’s own is redolent of what we saw in Muraro’s readings, in which she also pointed to the relief felt by G.H. once she let go of the effort of maintaining “the third leg.” The third leg, though not referred to as such by Cavarero, is described here as relating to Lispector’s concept of the social organization of G.H.’s “I,” one which is formed according to the codes prescribed by a patriarchal system. Neither Cavarero nor Muraro go into any further detail about the significance of G.H. as an artist, a feature of Lispector’s novel I find subversive and deserving of a more nuanced reading. The fact that G.H. is an artist can perhaps also be read as a reflection of Lispector’s own situation as an female artist in the 1960’s in Brazil. In fact, artists abound in Lispector’s texts: the “protagonist” of Água viva is a painter, and in A hora da estrela one of the protagonists, the one who tells the story, is a writer (and a man, which adds a fascinating dimension).

Indeed, all three images Cavarero picks out of the novel are related to art: the second image is of the mural on the wall of Janair the maid’s room, drawn by Janair herself. Here we have a remarkable mirroring/reversal of the maid as artist. Janair is described almost as an aside

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321 For an incredible reading of Lispecor and the Brazilian art scene see: Joyce Anitagrace, “The Writer as Visual Artist: Clarice Lispector’s A Paixão segundo G.H. in Dialogue with the Neo-Concrete Art Movement” Luso-Brazilian Review, Volume 51, Number 2, 2014, pp. 31-67. “Artists such as Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape, based in the Rio de Janeiro of the 1950s and 1960s, were part of the Neo-Concrete movement. They share with Lispector an aesthetic based on the experimentation with formal elements. Their art explores the idea that a work of visual art is intended not only for the eye, but all of the senses. Their work is abstract, yet emphasizes, at least in theory, a deliberate relationship with the body: that of the artist as well as that of the viewer, who is also a “participant” in the work of art. And their work explores and challenges ideas about the relationship between Self and Other. It is useful to compare these similar aesthetics, worked out in a visual medium, with Lispector’s fiction since the novel describes G.H.’s process as a visual one, of re-learning to see, and also since the book focuses so much on the visual, explicitly describing a drawing, as well as G.H.’s contemplations of photos, and her own artistic processes as a sculptor.” (33).

322 An interesting topic for an article!
by Cavarero as “un’indigena di colore.” This is a highly problematic description, revealing a Eurocentric obliviousness and/or presumption on Cavarero’s part. There is absolutely no indication in the text that the maid, Janair, is indigenous. In fact, Janair is described by Lispector as follows throughout the chapter she appears in:

I saw her black and motionless face again, saw her wholly opaque skin that seemed more like yet another of her ways of being silent, her extremely well drawn eyebrows, I saw her fine and delicate features barely discernible against the closed-off blackness of her skin.

And her clothes? It wasn’t surprising that I’d used her as if she had no presence: beneath her small apron, she always wore dark brown or black, which made her entirely dark and invisible - I shivered to discover that until now I hadn’t noticed that the woman was an invisible person.

Charcoal and fingernail coming together, charcoal and fingernail, calm and compact rage of that woman who represented a silence as though representing a foreign country, the African queen.

Janair is described clearly as having African origin, yet even though the text clearly refers to her having black skin, Cavarero conflates black skin with being native Brazilian which is profoundly offensive to Afro-Brazilians and the colonial history of the Atlantic slave trade. This would be the equivalent of saying, in the American context, that a Native American and an African-American are one and the same, both of color and native. The racist undertones of the Brazilian text, which are a reflection and criticism of Brazilian culture, are ignored and simultaneously

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323 Ibid. 299. This description seems to be taken verbatim from Rosi Braidotti’s essay, “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza,” Questioni di teoria femminista, (Milano: La Tartaruga Ed., 1993), 94. The Braidotti reads “una brasiliana indigena, dalla pelle scura e assolutamente non eurocentrica come G.H.”. I will discuss this in the following chapter.

324 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 32-33 and 35 respectively.
amplified by Cavarero. It is difficult to understand why Cavarero even includes “un’indigena di colore - ” in her description of the maid, whose name, Janair, she does not use, even though, quite symbolically, the maid is named and the protagonist is not. It would honestly have been better to not include this phrase, and leave the issues of race and class untouched upon as Muararo did in her work, a lacuna which also speaks volumes but does not necessarily speak so negatively and obtusely. Could there be a connection with the negligent lack of inclusion of non-white, non-Western perspectives in Cavarero’s anthology?

Cavarero focuses on what Janair drew on the wall of her room, the three figures, a man, a woman and a dog. When G.H. enters the room and sees the mural, she identifies first with the man:

  In a way my discomfort was amusing: it had never occurred to me that, in Janair’s muteness, there might have been a reprimand of my life, which her silence might have called “a wanton life”? how had she judged me?

  I looked at the mural where I was likely depicted… I, the Man.”

Cavarero reads this scene (though she does not quote directly from it) as a consequence of G.H. intuiting that the maid had thought of and represented her as the man, in other words, in a position of power. As I wrote in the previous chapter, how else could G.H. exist to Janair but as a man? I also covered the erroneous creative liberty with the phrase “a wanton life,” which in the original Portuguese is “uma vida de homens,” and is likewise translated into Italian as “una vita da uomo;” “a man’s life” would be a more accurate and open translation. I find it surprising

325 For readings of the text in English which deal with issues of race and class, Reis, Antigrace, and Peixoto.

326 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 32.

that Cavarero does not go deeper in her analysis of this scene, not only because of the possible implications of “a man’s life,” but also the fact that G.H. identifies at first with man with a capital “M,” the so-called universal subject which Cavarero herself describes as a monster and deconstructs as being at once neuter and male in several of her early texts. Her reading is still closer to my own than Muraro’s, connecting “the passion of sexual difference as the passion of the false image,” with a modern day “masculinizing” emancipation of women.

The third art-related female image selected for analysis by Cavarero is that of the photograph. G.H. describes herself in photographs as, Cavarero quotes, a “pretty replica,” an image of that which she is not, an image of her “non essere.”

The image of the self in quotation marks is stunning in its effectiveness in conveying the female experience of, as we saw in Muraro, “l’essere finto,” or the “organizzazione posticcia” in Cavarero’s terms. Lispector’s use of punctuation in this passage is remarkable: a multiple, flowing usage of mirror-like colons, form and content reflecting each other in the passage. Although the photograph reflects a false image, that which G.H. is not, Cavarero still finds, through the “eyes full of silence” looking back at G.H. from her photograph, a connection back

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329 Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 23. G.H. describes herself as having quotation marks to the left and right of herself in this same sharp chapter.
to the animal-divine similar to what we saw in *In Spite of Plato*: the eyes seem to come from “un abisso di quiete senza tensione e senza intenzione: come gli occhi dell’animale, e soprattutto come gli occhi della blatta che G.H. incontra nel suo itinerario di Passione.”330 The eyes serve not as a mirror but a conduit, and create a channel between the cockroach and G.H.

Through G.H.’s anthropophagic ingestion of the cockroach’s body, she discovers that she herself is “animale da grandi profondità umide.”331 Cavarero replays her reading of the cockroach and its connection to the maternal continuum from *In Spite of Plato*; in the context of “La passione della differenza” Cavarero focuses on the annihilation of the “I” through depersonalization, “che proprio nello smantellare le fondamenta logocentriche del soggetto mediante la centralità del corpo, recupera a un senso nuovo, questa volta divino, il segno femminile della sessuazione: sia questo il luogo di umidità profonde oppure il segreto di una carne generante.”332 Thus why, according to Cavarero, G.H. is finally able to identify with the image of the woman on Janair’s mural. The image, which is an empty outline of a woman, is not a negative portrayal for Cavarero; in fact, the outline of a woman represents the depersonalized yet still gendered female that appears in her elementary and unchanged form like an archaic graffiti drawing. G.H. is therefore no longer the neuter universal “Man”-monster; upon the completion of her depersonalizing passion process, she can now start from ground zero: I, woman. Cavarero revels in the divine revelation of the three images together, the “reciproca

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331 Again I make reference to the *Manifest Antropofágico*.
332 Ibid. 301.
gloria vivente” of woman, man and dog, with a special privilege given to woman as part of the maternal continuum, called here “il ciclo infinito della rigenerazione.”

In “La passione della differenza,” Cavarero concludes her reading of Lispector’s *The Passion According to G.H.* as a passion of sexual difference based on the passion of the image as well as the appropriation of the female mystic tradition of choosing a bodily path to affirming gendered identity. Cavarero adds the role of language, dialoguing with Hélène Cixous’ reading of the text as an experience of the maternal body itself. This connection with Cixous is expanded in the footnote on the same page as a part of a genealogy of feminist readings of Lispector’s text, a revealing and affirming citation practice: Cixous’ “L’approccio di Clarice Lispector,” Luisa Muraro’s “Commento alla ‘Passione secondo G.H.’,” Cavarero’s own *Nonostante Platone*, and Rosi Braidotti’s “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale.” This footnote was part of the genesis of this dissertation, which seeks to evaluate texts by these four authors related to the work of Clarice Lispector and each other. Cavarero’s final observation on language in Lispector’s text is one of her most interesting: that language, in its rupture with phallogocentric “organization” and its expression of a female body which is “profondo, umido e ritmato,” itself becomes a sort of image which the desire for identity is able to capture and treasure (from Italian tesaurizzare).

We arrive at the point in the text, post-Lispector reading, that leads Cavarero to question the female mystic tradition as model, a critique I agree with: that it cannot be held as either

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333 Ibid. 301-302.

334 Ibid. 301-302.
exclusive nor generalizable. Cavarero is concerned with finding a modern passion of sexual difference, a path to valuing gender difference that is affirming and not based on suffering:

La via mistica, nel suo tipico itinerario di spersonalizzazione, sembra infatti chiedere un sacrificio dell’individualità che risulta alla fine troppo grande o, addirittura, contraddittorio rispetto a quella passione per l’immagine che molte donne sentono oggi radicata in un desiderio singolare di affermazione.

This question is, to me, one of the fundamental points of discord between Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero: Muraro’s continued investment in the female mystic tradition, both as theory and model, seems to be, for Cavarero, problematically both narrow and stifling as a broader model for women. As we will see in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter, Cavarero places great value on the individual, whereas Muraro continually focuses on community. What we are left to wonder is whether Lispector is included in Cavarero’s evaluation of female mysticism: will Cavarero leave Lispector “behind” in her search for new paths toward subjectivity?

The remainder of “La passione della differenza” seeks to elaborate a starting point for an affirmative itinerary for sexual difference while accommodating the desire for individual identity; in other words, we witness the beginnings of Cavarero’s theory of individual uniqueness and the narratable self which will culminate in 1997’s Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti (Relating Narratives, 2000). The desire for female identity by and for women is related to the idea of visibility, of a desire to be really seen: “non è dunque un caso che il corpo, già al centro dell’esperienza mistica della passione della differenza sessuale, si confermi al centro di una

\[335\] Ibid. 302.
passione, di nuovo tutta femminile, per la visibilità.”

Being, existing, and appearing are all, Cavarero notes, practically one and the same. Cavarero hopes for female images where each is different but at the same time similar to each other. The difficulty arises not in the physical locus but in the logical one. The militancy of the piazza has opened ways to female presence in academia (“campi del sapere”); hence two projects emerge according to the author: the “negative” critical work of deconstructing the patriarchal foundations of discourse, and the positive work of new images of gendered subjectivity.

Where does Lispector’s novel fit within Cavarero’s framework of negative and positive projects? Cavarero ends her section in “La passione della differenza” on female mysticism and Lispector by saying “come le mistiche, Lispector è per più versi interessante.” As a modern-day female Passion, The Passion According to G.H. narrates a process of depersonalization which is akin to feminist deconstructions of patriarchal discourses. G.H. undergoes a deconstruction of the self, a “negative” process necessary in order to then embark on finding multiple routes to her female subjectivity. Thus, it would seem that the philosophical itinerary present in Lispector’s novel provides a road map to arriving at the point of Janair’s outline of a woman, ready to be filled-in for and seen uniquely by each woman. Lispector does not offer a model of female identity at the end of the novel; like the initials of her protagonist G.H., she leaves us with the openness of possibility:

Oh God, I was feeling baptized by the world. I had put the roach’s matter into my mouth, and finally performed the tiniest act.

336 Ibid. 304.
337 Ibid. 303.
Not the maximum act, as I had thought before, not heroism and sainthood. But at last the tiniest act that I had always been missing. I had always been incapable of the tiniest act. And with the tiniest act, I had deheroized myself. I, who had lived from the middle of the road, had finally taken the first step along its beginning.  

Lispector’s novel models that which Cavarero goes on to suggest in the remainder of her article, which is that there should be space for a multiplicity of female figures within the female symbolic. She openly criticizes Luisa Muraro and others who elevate the maternal figure above all others; she sides with Irigaray on this point, “per quanto decisiva rispetto al matricidio simbolico su cui è cresciuto il ‘vampirismo metafisico,’ non viene dunque da Irigaray isolata, ipostatizzata, sacralizzata a discapito di altre figure della soggettività femminile, ma viene a inserirsi nella molteplice tessitura relazionale di un ordine simbolico aperto e diveniente.”

Thus, Cavarero concludes, that it is the openness to a multiplicity of figures that has enabled contemporary feminism to proceed and succeed with a diversity of voices; this openness to multiplicity put Cavarero at odds with Muraro and Diotima. According to Lucia Re, for Muraro “the community itself has become an absolute,” with Mother-Muraro at the top. Muraro distances herself from Irigaray, choosing instead to support the notion of a need for permanent female communities not contingent on modifying society and culture. The female self-containment as practiced by Diotima with Muraro at the helm led to, in Re’s reading, uniformity and lack of dissent.

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Cavarero's departure from Diotima is the ultimate mark of her dissent from their practices, though she still remains a proponent of *il pensiero della differenza sessuale*: “sexual difference theory, with which I grew up politically and intellectually, insists on the practice of relationally between women and on the centrality of bodies.”\(^{341}\) After her early work, which includes the foundational readings of Lispector we have read above, Cavarero continues to formulate an ontology and politics of embodied uniquenes. In her bestselling *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, translated as *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero builds on the notion of a female passion of visibility seeded in “La passione della differenza.”\(^{342}\) Though she does not quote from Lispector directly, I believe Lispector’s *The Passion According to G.H.* deeply informs her theory of the narratable self. The two texts could be read beautifully together, which in order to fully explore would require more space than I can provide in this present project.

However, her narratable self theory is summarized in an article, “*Who Engenders Politics?*” published in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice* (2002), in which Muraro also publishes an article, “The Passion of Feminine Difference beyond Equality.” I would like to discuss these two articles briefly as a final opportunity to reflect on their differences, an opportunity highly suggested by their side by side publication. It is remarkable that both articles are preceded by Lucia Re’s article “Diotima’s Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism,” which itself treats the departure of Cavarero from the group; Re’s article sets

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up—and biases—what follows: “whatever their shortcomings may be, Muraro’s and Diotima’s work and, especially, their conflicts with Adriana Cavarero and other thinkers, such as Rosi Braidotti, who share their fundamental concern with sexual difference, raise issues that are at the heart of feminist reflection today.”

I will follow the order the articles are published in.

Muraro’s article reaffirms her commitment to sexual difference freed from the paradigm of equality, citing her “blazing star,” Carla Lonzi. Her purpose here is to answer her own question: “is it really necessary for us to accept the paradigm of equality or can we incorporate, in our discussions and in political reality, relations of difference and asymmetry that characterize life, without also opening the door to domination and hierarchy?” Her response is: the politics of relations (which can also be considered the practice of relations). Muraro makes a strong, explicit claim for Italian feminism:

> The politics of relations is an invention of women’s politics in Italy. It operates by valorizing the relationships that we already have or by activating new ones, and entrusting to the very dynamism of the relationships the most important problems we have. (…) Relationships make us be who we are, we are the relationships, beginning with the maternal relationship, from which we get life and the word, together.

This is a bold claim, a claim that is not part of the dominant Western narrative of feminism; perhaps the claim itself is a response, taking advantage of the English publication and public. For Muraro, the free sense of feminine difference and politics of relations go hand in hand; she uses Nietzsche to illustrate that the paradigm of equality is a mask that gives voice to the desire to prevail over others, in other words, the phallus.

343 Re, 69.


345 Ibid. 80.
Muraro emphasizes that feminine difference does not aim towards supremacy over the other, but clarifies that “the other” of woman is not reducible to the other sex. It is also “the other-woman, the other-mother, the other-God, the other-nature, the other that I myself am for myself (...) it is the other of the lacking or of the dependence, in an accepted experience that becomes converted, at times, into love.”

For Muraro, the knowledge gained from this experience forms the basis of a politics that can free men and women from phallocentrism or the phallic fixation. If women are freed from subordination and/or imitation of man, then a politics of desire can emerge in which as a society we need not “pretend that we are all equal, a society regulated, in its real disparities, by relationships of exchange, more or less peaceful (even conflict is a relationship), in which everyone, a little or a lot, can find something to gain.” What she does not discuss here is the wrench sexual desire throws into all of this. For Muraro, this is not a Utopian dream because we already often enjoy or gain things without humiliating others through exchanges. Hence, she claims, non-antagonistic desire becomes a “creator of abundant good.” She closes with a subtle nod to Diotima, the woman who taught Plato about love: “Let us learn (we learn) from those who know how to love.”

In “Who Engenders Politics?” Cavarero undermines the essentialist debates once and for all, and I have followed suit in this project. My intention has been not to rehash the debates themselves, or make any truth claims, but show how these accusations of essentialism have caused Italian sexual difference theory and its thinkers to be left by the wayside of the dominant discourse, even though their contribution of relational subjectivity is significant. Publications

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346 Ibid. 84-85.
347 Ibid. 85.
such as *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice* exist from this perspective, but unfortunately most often these attempts to “center” Italian thought are themselves attempts to gain recognition that continue to ignore other marginalized scenes; in other words, it is self-centered and self-centering. Given the context of publication, Cavarero makes an important point about what she deems the inter-sorority battle between European essentialism vs. Anglo-American postmodernism: considering that feminist theory finds itself in the paradoxical but, she says, unarguable position of dismantling the master’s house using his tools, “it seems to me, then, that it would be much more useful to mix the tools, use them maliciously and betray them intentionally.”

The work is simultaneously demolishing and constructing, and the only considerations for the new houses should be “the material conditions of different places and the desires of the inhabitants.”

This last statement is really critical to me from a Transloca and decolonial feminist perspective. What I tend to find problematic or missing about the Italian theories of relationality is that they do not seem to translate or extend transnationally - the politics of relations seems to be highly localized and problematically ethnocentric. From the uniqueness of the subject, to the relationship between unique subjects, “this relationality is material, contextual, local, and current.” There is a preoccupation with the body, and its location, “each of us is practically in relation to those with whom—here and now, in a specific physical space and in a specific definite time—one is exposed,” but there is then no theorizing about how the greater scenes

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348 Cavarero, “Who Engenders Politics?” in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice*, 88-89. Meanwhile, she notes, the “male masters” are discussed with respect and passion on this feminist turf, while the masters themselves are so busy with their own legitimizing that they continue to assume a superfluous/ignorable position of feminists.

349 Ibid. 90.
relate; there is no openness to transnational feminism, there are perhaps only the relationships between feminist thinkers.\footnote{Adriana Cavarero, with Elisabetta Bertolino, interview, “Beyond Ontology and Sexual Difference: An Interview with Italian Feminist Philosopher Adriana Cavarero,” \textit{differences: A Journal of Feminist Culture} Vol. 19, No. 1 (2008), 162.} Cavarero has indeed managed, unlike her other Italian colleagues, to overcome the “disconessione transatlantica.”\footnote{Adriana Cavarero with Alessia Ronchetti, interview, “Pensare la differenza, tra filosofia e politica. Intervista ad Adriana Cavarero,” \textit{Italian Studies}, Vol. 66, No. 1 (March 2011), 129. Her work on ethics of narrative and the dependence and vulnerability of the self have led her to a “relazione seconda” with anglophone thinkers such as Christine Battersby and Judith Butler, and her books are regularly translated into English. (130)} This may have something to do not only with her work, but also how she stresses the uniqueness of feminist philosophers: “Non solo ognuna di noi ha una biografia intellettuale che risente dei linguaggi e degli stili che ci hanno formate (o, se volete, \textit{ci} parlano), ma ognuna è anche una pensatrice in movimento, disposta a farsi contaminare da altri linguaggi e, sopratutto, aperta a percorsi auto-critici. Visto che il mondo cambia e sono i fenomeni del mondo a sollecitare la nostra comprensione e a sfidare le nostre categorie, la coerenza sarebbe una specie di stupidità.”\footnote{Ibid. 130.}

In her essay Cavarero puts forward her theory of identity as life story, as a way to threaten the universality of the metaphysical subject and the obligatory fragmentariness of the postmodernist subject. The question, for Cavarero, is \textit{“who are you?”} The who is expositive and relational, the specular ontology I mentioned earlier, and which I believe connects to her reading of images in Lispector. G.H.’s process of depersonalization is the shedding of the what to reveal the who, as Lispector writes, “We shall be the living matter revealing itself directly, ignorant of word, surpassing thought which is always grotesque.”\footnote{Lispector, 182.} This specular ontology is Cavarero’s
strategy of embodying uniqueness vis-a-vis some invisible essential substance. She contrasts this to “what” one is, upon which modern Western political models are made.

Who, then, engenders politics? Cavarero’s answer is “If I must limit myself to my experience as an Italian feminist, then I would have to say that the politics of sexual difference that makes a practice out of its own theory speaks this language. (...) Such a language, in the very complex and even conflictual panorama of Italian feminism, has one point largely shared by the practice of partire da sè and of relazioni fra donne. The two formulas cannot be separated.” Though it could be possible to read Cavarero’s theory as a critique of intersectional politics, I think she is actually arguing the opposite - that who and what are inseparable. Furthermore, Cavarero argues that uniqueness renders superfluous the eternal controversy about sexual difference, but in an Irigarayan vein, it places collective identities as secondary (in the sense that the who exposes herself relationally hence prevents any single, common identity from becoming a static and/or primary figure). I agree with her conclusion about destroying the imperialism of the what; it is still unclear if and how this politics can travel across borders; perhaps Braidotti will offer some solutions.

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355 Ibid. 101.
CHAPTER FOUR:

ROSI BRAIDOTTI AND CLARICE LISPECTOR:

AFFIRMATIVE QUANTUM FEMINISM

Being is being beyond human.
—Clarice Lispector 356

We arrive at the third and final Italian feminist scholar I will be discussing in this project, Rosi Braidotti. Born in Italy in 1954, Braidotti spent most of her youth in Australia (she holds dual Italian-Australian citizenship). Her graduate studies were completed at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, and today she is a Distinguished University Professor at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, where she has taught since 1988. She is considered by many the most prominent European scholar of comparative feminist theory today.357 Notice that the word used to describe Braidotti is European: she is indeed an transnational figure, a fact which greatly influences her theoretic perspectives and theories. Yet, as European as Braidotti self-describes herself to be, she maintains strong ties to Italian feminist thinking, defending il pensiero della

356 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 182.
differenza sessuale from accusations of essentialism and inserting herself into the particular Italian feminist genealogy I have been exploring throughout this thesis through her readings of Clarice Lispector. For Braidotti, “the Italian path to feminism has revealed a more political way to read sexual difference, filling the distance between the literary-symbolic project of some women, and the more socio-political project of others.”\textsuperscript{358} In her own work, Braidotti makes a case for a feminist nomadic politics, a strategy for transcending precisions such as class, race and sexual preference without losing their “situated-ness;” in her own words, “generalizations about women should be replaced by cartographic accuracy, attention to and accountability for differences among women.”\textsuperscript{359}

Braidotti’s work on the figure of the nomad, with its attention to location and cartography, and over time, to relationality, relates closely to the “agential realism” ontoepistemology theorized by Karen Barad, which I invoked in my introduction. I am also reminded of the principles underlying quantum mechanics. In physics, the uncertainty principle states that we cannot precisely measure both the momentum and the location of a particle simultaneously. Measuring momentum implies a constant change in position, while pinpointing an exact location implies fixity, a disruption of momentum. Therefore, in describing a particle’s behavior, there can only be a constant dance between the two measurements. Likewise, in the practice of today’s transnational, trans-disciplinary feminism, and in thinking about Braidotti’s feminist nomadic politics, as “female feminist subjects,” we grapple with our attempts to reconcile individual and collective subjectivity, to be ourselves without losing the grander scale of our political

\textsuperscript{358} Ibid. 59

momentum.\textsuperscript{360} In my opinion, of the three Italian thinkers discussed in this project, Braidotti’s theories are the most “quantum,” in the sense that she attempts to theorize complex, interrelated processes involving bodies in motion. It is my purpose in this chapter to follow the trail of Braidotti’s readings of Clarice Lispector over time, situating her both within the genealogy of this project and beyond, from my decolonial feminist perspective.

Like Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero before her, Rosi Braidotti focuses her readings of Clarice Lispector mostly on \textit{The Passion According to G.H.} I use the word before, although as we shall see, Braidotti read Lispector practically concomitantly with Muraro and Cavarero. Her first reading of Lispector appears in an article titled “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale,” which was published in 1993 but was presented at a conference in Glasgow in July 1991.\textsuperscript{361} The article cites the work of Cixous (1986/1988), Muraro’s “Commento alla Passione secondo G.H.” (1988) and \textit{L’ordine simbolico della madre} (1991), and Cavarero’s \textit{Nonostante Platone} (1990). Luisa Muraro was present at the same “Questioni di teoria femminista” conference in Glasgow, and also contributes an essay to the resulting publication. Thus, a first myth must be debunked: Braidotti, Cavarero and Muraro are actually contemporaries, though the way they are characterized in anthologies such as Cavarero and Restiano’s and known internationally would suggest otherwise. Through her reading of Lispector we witness Braidotti in dialogue with her Italian peers, a process which simultaneously locates her within a Franco-Italian feminist genealogy. I propose that reading Lispector functions as a multiple rite of passage in this group.

\textsuperscript{360} Braidotti borrows this term from Teresa De Lauretis, \textit{Technologies of Gender}, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

“Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale” (1993) opens with an overview of recent feminist theory’s fraught, “unresolved” relationship with materialism. Braidotti states her purpose as “mettere in luce alcuni degli aspetti del neomaterialismo implicito ed esplicito della pratica della differenza sessuale, e valutare la portata dell’eredità del femminismo degli anni ’80.” In other words, as a new “female feminist subject:” she wants to go beyond useless polarizations and conflicts towards what I call finding points of contact. This marks the beginning of the “return” narrative of material feminism, which, according to Hemmings, is always returning.

Braidotti credits Luce Irigaray with “intuiting” the root word mater in the word materialism, and that hence the maternal can be read as both the site of origin of the subject as well as “istanza che esprime la specificità del soggetto femminile.” The connection of the maternal to the material body is the site of Irigaray’s theorization of an alternative female symbolic rooted in sexual difference, in which an alternative female genealogy is crucial, all of which became major focal points/points of departure for Italian feminist thinkers as we have seen with Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero. Braidotti formulates her own initial take on the political practice of il pensiero della differenza sessuale as such:

...la rivendicazione di riconoscimento materiale e simbolico da parte di donne politicamente motivate: “il soggetto femminile femminista” è una nuova entità epistemologica e politica che deve essere definita e affermata dalle donne nel confronto tra le loro molteplici differenze, di classe, di razza, di scelta sessuali.

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362 Ibid. 88.
363 See Hemmings, Why Stories Matter, op. cit., as well as Alaimo and Hekman, eds., Material Feminisms, op.cit. In Material Feminisms, material feminism is described in terms of a return narrative (as in, “it needs to return” but has in fact been “returning” for over a decade!).
364 Ibid. 88-89.
365 Ibid. 89.
Hence, by casting Teresa De Lauretis’ figure of “il soggetto femminile femminista” in the role of what previously was broadly “woman,” Braidotti helps relieve the burden of essentialism from sexual difference theory. Of the thinkers discussed in this project, she is the only one who truly tackles issues of race, class, sexuality, and does so increasingly over time, often, as we shall see, in response to critiques.

Braidotti borrows from Michel Foucault and proposes “installing a counter-memory,” a “critical genealogy” as opposed to an alternative memory as part of the project of situating a new female subjectivity. Thusly can we read her own self-insertion into a critical feminist genealogy of sexual difference relating to Clarice Lispector. Braidotti is clear that her focus is feminist theory, hence her explanation: “considero la teoria femminista di oggi come un’attività il cui fine è di articolare insieme i problemi di identità individuale di genere e le questioni di soggettività politica, collegando entrambi con il problema della conoscenza e della legittimazione epistemologica.” Behind the female feminist subject is the will for political change, coupled with the desire for the new, which implicates, for the author, “la costruzione di nuovi soggetti desideranti.” Indeed, as we have seen in previous chapters of this project, desire plays a central role in sexual difference theory, “il desiderio di essere, semplicemente essere.” For Braidotti and Cavarero, the desire for new female subjects implies, however, a multiplicity of becoming(s), not a specific model or figure, such as Muraro’s insistence on the mother.

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366 Ibid. 89. My project itself also attempts to provide counter-memories related to the points of contact generated by the Lispector citations.
367 Ibid. 89.
368 Ibid.
369 See Chapter Two.
Thus, Braidotti concludes that sexual difference feminism should be read as:

…l’esaltazione dell’importanza politica del desiderio rispetto alla volontà, e del ruolo di sottolineare il ruolo del desiderio nella costruzione del soggetto, non semplice desiderio libidinale bensì desiderio ontologico, il desiderio di essere, la vocazione del soggetto ad essere, la pre-disposizione del soggetto a essere.\(^\text{370}\)

Coupled with the desire to be is also an ontological leap forward, as Braidotti characterizes it, where the political collective subject “noi donne” of the women’s movement can potentiate the individual becoming of each individual woman.\(^\text{371}\) Again, I see quantum motion at work, where collective motion can energize individual components toward their own becoming and vice-versa. Unlike Muraro who turns to a female mystic tradition, Braidotti does not look towards the past in search for a glorified and authentic archaic female power, or a “real” female experience that has remained hidden; instead she, like Cavarero, moves toward a positive, affirming project: “dar vita qui e ora a una modalità di rappresentazione che consideri il fatto di essere donna come forza politica positiva di autoaffermazione.”\(^\text{372}\) A crucial element or point of departure of this project of positive female self-affirmation is embodiment, in direct opposition to the traditional “neutral” pseudo-disembodied universal subject (Cavarero’s “monster”). For thinkers of sexual difference, the sexed body is the most basic element, it cannot be further split. The body “should be understood as a neither biological nor sociological category, but rather as an intersection between physical and symbol spheres and social material conditions.”\(^\text{373}\) Thus, according to Braidotti, one can speak as a woman without that being some sort of defined monolithic essence

\(^{370}\) Ibid. 90.

\(^{371}\) Ibid. 90.

\(^{372}\) Ibid. 90-91.

\(^{373}\) Ibid. 91. Translation mine.
but rather “il luogo di esperienze multiple, complesse, e potenzialmente contraddittorie, definito da variabili che si sovrappongono.”

Thus, feminist materialism is both corporeal and sexed, a link strengthened through the political will to find a better and more adequate representation of the corporeal, embodied reality of women. To cap off her defense of theorists of sexual difference from outcries of essentialism Braidotti credits them with actually de-essentializing the discourse by not fixing “woman” to either nature (one is born) or social-cultural construct (one becomes). Instead sexual difference thinkers place “woman” at the intersection of nature and culture; Braidotti quotes Elizabeth Grosz: “solo una nozione come quella di corpo, universale nella sua generalità e tuttavia “aperta” alle significazioni ed esigenze particolari di ogni cultura, è in grado di soddisfare le condizioni di una ridefinizione femminista dell’identità femminile.” Grosz’s notion reminds me of the empty outlines of Janair’s mural in The Passion According to G.H. I agree that the body is and must be the site of redefining female identities. Braidotti states that the body as theoretical topos corresponds to a desire to overcome the classic cartesian dualism of body/mind in order to rethink ex-novo the structure of the thinking subject. That human bodies are sexed male or female is taken as a given and must not be considered a dualism in the oppositional/dichotomous sense it has acquired in phallocentrist thinking. In other words, bodies are male or female but neither category has any specific meaning.

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374 Ibid. 91.
375 I am paraphrasing from Ibid. 92.
376 Ibid. 92.
377 See also Cavarero, interview, “Beyond Ontology and Sexual Difference,” where she says sexual difference is a corporeal given, a banality evident when a baby is born, with the exception of rare cases.
Braidotti choses to “spiegarmi meglio usando un esempio literario,” a reading of Clarice Lispector’s 1964 novel *The Passion According to G.H.* under the heading “Ciò che Clarice sapeva” (“That which Clarice knew”).\(^{378}\) She calls the novel “conosciutissimo,” a label I would hesitate to use outside of Brazil in 1991, though considering the audience of the essay perhaps (via Cixous and Muraro) the book was indeed known. Her description of G.H. merits a full citation:

Il personaggio principale della *Passione* è l’immagine della consapevolezza femminile post-emancipazione: una scultrice che vive in un attico di un lussuoso edificio in una moderna metropolis sudamericana. Rappresenta i vantaggi di classe - eleganza, agio, indipendenza economica e creatività. Inoltre si è anche conquistato il diritto ad una stanza tutta per sé, sia economicamente che sessualmente. È l’unica proprietaria di quello spazio non avendo né marito né figli; è dunque l’equivalente sociale di un qualsiasi uomo.\(^{379}\)

Braidotti does not situate the novel historically in the body of her text, so the reader is left to check when the novel was written, especially since the wording “post-emancipazione” seems a bit misleading: a self-supporting single woman artist like G.H. —and Lispector herself— in Brazil in 1964 was certainly not the *norm*. The Brazilianness of Rio De Janeiro is also erased as a South American metropolis. The character is transgressive; she attempts to live a “man’s life,” challenging the current gendered expectations and limitations of her society. Thus, although the description is mostly accurate in terms of what is described in the text, I am not totally comfortable with the final analysis that G.H. is the social equivalent of a “any man.” In fact, Lispector describes G.H. as a sculptor which “for a woman this reputation means a lot socially,

\(^{378}\) Ibid. 93.

\(^{379}\) Ibid. 93.
and placed me, for others as for myself, in a region that is socially between women and men.”

Cavarero interestingly critiques this so-called “social elevation” as the false “emancipation” of women that is actually the masculinization of women.

Braidotti describes the “plot” of the narrative as “varcare una serie di soglie.” Like Ulysse’s hubristic varco folle in Dante’s Paradiso, which mirrored the poet’s own transgressions as a writer, in the case of Lispector’s G.H., the transgressions performed by the protagonist and by the author herself in both form and content are all the more striking for their expression of female ontological desire. The thresholds crossed by G.H. are encounters with “otherness:”

“secondo una serie di variabili differenzianti: classe/ razza/ stile di vita/ l’inumano/ l’animale/ il cosmico. Il risultato di questo processo è la progressiva perdita di identità fino alla sua dissoluzione in un divenire cosmico.” Braidotti covers five thresholds/boundaries crossed by G.H., the first of which is class, which is tightly intertwined with race and ethnicity. Here we encounter a troubling reading on Braidotti’s part: “L’azione si svolge nel giorno di libertà della domestica, una brasiliana indigena, dalla pelle scura e assolutamente non eurocentrica come G.H.” First, the action actually takes place the day after G.H.’s maid Janair has quit, not on her day off (hence the complete emptiness of the room) as the text very plainly states: “The maid had

380 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 18. Emphasis mine. We saw in the last chapter the importance of this zone of in-between-ness for Cavarero.


382 Braidotti, “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale,” 93. Emphasis mine. Braidotti uses such Dantean language to describe G.H. and her process.

383 Ibid. 93-94.
quit the day before.”

Second, as I have already discussed at length in the previous three chapters, Janair, the maid, (whom Braidotti also does not name) is not an “indigenous” Brazilian. Braidotti’s description of G.H. as Eurocentric also strikes me as problematic: what is Braidotti implying? That G.H. must be white and therefore is Eurocentric? That all upper class Brazilians are Eurocentric? Or that a non-white Brazilian cannot be Eurocentric? In the critical genealogy of this project, there indeed seems to be either complete neglect of issues of race (Cixous and Muraro) or a superficial, cursory and erroneous acknowledgment of race in the novel (Cavarero and Braidotti).

Issues such as race and class are behind some of the major criticisms of sexual difference theory/theorists. In the case of Braidotti, who makes such a strong case for precision in terms of race/class/age/etc, it is surprising that she performs such a mis-reading/mis-location. She recovers a little ground in the rest of her description of the unnamed Janair: “Spinta dal desiderio di rimettere a posto una stanza che si aspetta sia disordinatissima, G.H. entra nell’alloggio della sua domestica. Il biancore e la pulizia della stanza la accecheranno e la metteranno di fronte alla cecità verso il colore tipico della sua cultura.” Braidotti does not acknowledge the inherent racism in the notion that G.H. assumed that the maid’s room would have been left in disarray. The whiteness and cleanliness of the room are also blinding in that they are shocking to G.H. — again, a comment on racism — she had “expected to find darkness.”

I agree with Braidotti that this surprise puts G.H. face to face with her indifference and blindness toward Janair, “the

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385 Braidotti, “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale,” 94.

African queen” as she is described in the text. We must see Janair at the coloniality of gender again:

I saw her black and motionless face again, saw her wholly opaque skin that seemed more like yet another of her ways of being silent, her extremely well drawn eyebrows, I saw her fine and delicate features barely discernible against the closed-off blackness of her skin.

And her clothes? It wasn’t surprising that I’d used her as if she had no presence: beneath her small apron, she always wore dark brown or black, which made her entirely dark and invisible - I shivered to discover that until now I hadn’t noticed that the woman was an invisible person. Janair almost only had an external form, the features within her form were so refined that they hardly existed: she was as flat as a bas-relief stuck on a board.

I wondered if Janair had really despised me - or if I, who hadn’t even looked at her, had been the one who despised her. 387

This chapter in *The Passion* is dense with material relating to race and class issues intersecting with gender and it is telling that none of the thinkers of sexual difference of this project engage with said material. It seems that their focus and concern is so centered on “Eurocentric” G.H. as woman and Other that they too are blind to Janair.

Moving on with Braidotti’s reading, the second threshold she mentions is of course the encounter with the cockroach, which represents “il crollo delle barriere fra l’umano e il suo altro, sia animale che inorganico.”388 The third *soglia* is the dissolution of the linearity of time, an important element of the novel not mentioned by Muraro or Cavarero, or Cixous in the texts covered in this project. For Braidotti, progressive, linear time is short-circuited by the circular time of G.H.’s process of becoming. Though she quotes Julia Kristeva’a “Women’s Time”

387 Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 35, 32-33 and 35 respectively. This chapter in the novel is also the discovery of the mural, which I discussed in detail in the context of Cavarero’s “La passione della differenza.”

388 Braidotti, “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale,” 94.
elsewhere in her essay, Braidotti does not make the connection here. Instead, she relates the collapse of time with an opening, “è uno spazio in cui l’anamorfosi e le illusioni ottiche accompagnano il crollo del tempo lineare.”389 Finally, the fifth crucial moment as Braidotti calls it is, in a Deleuzian vein, G.H.’s “becoming-insect.” An extension of the third soglia, here the encounter with the insect is characterized as the catalyst for G.H.’s shedding of the last vestiges of her “civilized self.”390 The ancient, immemorial roach, a hybrid creature between the imaginary and the scientific (here Braidotti quotes several descriptions of the cockroach from the text, unlike Janair), is included in a list of “esseri abietti” by Lispector, “vecchia come salamandre e chimere e grifoni e leviatani.”391 Abject creatures inhabit a realm of “intermediate states,” which includes the interface between life and death: “Gli esseri abietti sono eterni nel senso che sono uguali a quando sono stati creati: sono essenziali e perciò sacri, temuti, totemici. Corrispondono a stati ibridi e intermedi e come tali evocano sia fascino che orrore, sia desiderio che repulsione.”392

Here Braidotti includes the figure of the mother-as-life-giver as an abject figure (because birth eventually leads to death), which leads her to draw a link to the issue of abortion in the novel: “Clarice Lispector riconosce di avere scritto La passione secondo G.H. dopo l’esperienza di un aborto.”393 The issue of abortion is an overlooked aspect of the novel which demands more attention; however, Braidotti does not provide the source of her information regarding

389 Ibid. 95.
390 Ibid. 95.
391 Ibid. 95.
392 Ibid. 95.
393 Ibid. 96.
Lispector’s supposed acknowledgment of having written the novel after the experience of an abortion — which in Italian as in Portuguese can stand for both a miscarriage or an elective abortion (although usually a miscarriage is called aborto espontaneo, a spontaneous abortion, in Portuguese, to clarify). In terms of Lispector’s own documented life, she did in fact experience a miscarriage while living in London in 1950-1951; I have not been able to find any documentation regarding an elective abortion on Lispector’s part, certainly not an openly acknowledged one, as abortion remains illegal in Brazil until this day.\(^{394}\) The fact that an abortion is indeed present in 1964’s The Passion According to G.H. is, in my view, a transgressive and bold choice on Lispector’s part, one that could possibly have been censored had the novel been published during the Brazilian dictatorship, which began in mid 1964 shortly after the novel was published.

In the scene, G.H. gazes at the semi-dead cockroach, its antennae twitching, its insides oozing, and is reminded of her abortion:

> Its eyes kept looking at me monotonously, the two neutral and fertile ovaries. In them I was recognizing my two anonymous neutral ovaries. And I didn’t want to, ah, how I didn’t want to! (…)
> I was recognizing in theroach the saltlessness of the time I was pregnant. —— I recalled myself roaming the streets knowing I’d have the abortion, doctor, I who about children only knew and only would know that I was going to have an abortion. But at least I was getting to know pregnancy.\(^{395}\)

In addressing a doctor we can assume an illegal abortion performed medically but clandestinely, a testament to G.H.’s social class as illegal medical abortions were — and still are — available to those who can afford (and procure) them. G.H.’s abortion complicates in a positive way the

\(^{394}\) Vida, Clarice Lispector. https://claricelispectorims.com.br/vida/

\(^{395}\) Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 90.
readings done by Muraro, who invests in the figure of the mother and female mysticism on the one hand, and Cavarero, who suggests a maternal continuum through the figure of the cockroach-mother of the “fifteen million daughters” on the other.\textsuperscript{396} In the novel, we see a fertile roach contrasted with the memory of an elective abortion, which is not to suggest that choosing to terminate a pregnancy is somehow anti-maternal; on the contrary, women’s generative choice is fundamental, as Cavarero notes in relation to the myth of Demeter: “the myth of Demeter reveals a sovereign figure of female subjectivity who decided, in the concrete singularity of every woman, whether or not to generate.”\textsuperscript{397} The maternal continuum is not based on actual physical births, it is based on women’s potential to generate and gestate, and on every woman’s origin from a mother. Women are the arbiters of life and death, a power long feared in patriarchal society, and probably the very root of all of the forms of control and subjugation of women historically.

The account is punctuated with animal, organic images which create a mirroring between pregnant G.H. and the roach: “the pores of a child were devouring like the mouth of a waiting fish,” “I too was no more than thousands of cilia of a neutral protozoan beating, I had already known within myself the shiny gaze of a roach captured at the waist,” “I was full of neutral plankton,” “pregnancy: I had been flung into the happy horror of the neutral life that lives and moves.”\textsuperscript{398} Lispector trespasses and collapses the boundaries between animal and human, with palimpsestic convergences between G.H/roach, pregnancy/oozing roach, roach/child:

\textsuperscript{396} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{397} Adriana Cavarero, \textit{In Spite of Plato}, 64. Though she addresses issues of procreative choice, Cavarero chooses not to address the abortion in Lispector’s novel in her readings.

\textsuperscript{398} Lispector, \textit{The Passion According to G.H.}, 90-91.
When night arrived, I was making up my mind about the abortion I’d already made up my mind about, lying on the bed with my thousands of faceted eyes spying on the dark, with lips blackened from breathing, without thinking, without thinking, making up my mind, making up my mind: on those nights all of me was slowly blackening from my own plankton just as the matter of the roach was yellowing, and my gradual blackening was keeping track of the passing time. And was all that love for the child?

If so, then love is much more than love: love is something before love: it’s plankton struggling, and the great living neutrality struggling. Just like the life of the roach stuck at the waist.  

The great living neutrality: the unborn, gender-less potential of life. 

Through a crushed roach Lispector manages to evoke a beautiful image of love as only she can. Braidotti makes a broad, suggestive statement that “tutto il racconto può essere letto come un rituale di depurazione della memoria delle tracce dell’incontro con la materia organica che vi è o può esservi all’interno del corpo femminile. Ed esprime anche con chiarezza il confronto con il materno in quanto luogo abietto ma inevitabile di identità femminile.” It is somewhat unclear if Braidotti is referring to the account of the abortion or to the entire novel when she suggests it can be read as a woman purging herself of memories of her brief pregnancy and subsequent abortion. The source of Braidotti’s reading can be found in G.H.’s comparison of the narration of her abortion to vomiting at the end of the chapter:

As if having said the word “mother” had freed inside myself a thick and white part — the intense vibration of the oratorio suddenly stopped, and the minaret fell mute. And as after an intense attack of vomiting, my forehead was relieved, fresh and cold. No longer even fear, no longer even fright.

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399 Ibid. 91.
400 The egg with its X chromosome, the chromosome we all share, present since birth in the female body.
401 Cixous is particularly apt at describing Lispector’s ability to evoke “the lesson of ugliness.”
402 Braidotti, “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale,” 96.
403 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 93.
Such is the cathartic and empowering nature of narration, of telling one’s story, and telling it—and this is critical—to another woman. G.H.’s address to her/the/a mother connects her to a maternal/female continuum: she becomes the roach, oozing her own liberation which she later internalizes. However, though the novel could indeed be read as the purging of an abortion experience, in my opinion it is only one of many layers to be stripped in G.H.’s path towards depersonalization, toward a “living neutral” that is still female.

The roach, “crushed at the waist,” as we have seen quoted again and again in previous chapters, is characterized as female in Lispector’s novel. I would now like to quote the passage more fully in the context of the abortion account:

The neutral was my deepest and most living root. (…) To escape the neutral, I had long since forsaken the being for the persona, for the human mask. When I humanized myself, I’d freed myself from the desert.
I’d freed myself from the desert, yes, but had also lost it! and also lost the forests, and lost the air, and lost the embryo inside me.
But there it is, the neutral roach, without a name for pain or for love. Its only differentiation in life is that it has to be either male or female. I had only thought of it as female, since things crushed at the waist are female.404

Here we see G.H. admit that her humanized, organized self was a mask, a superficial performance which disconnected her from life, from living, from her female origins; she had feared the neutral and its profundity, but now she sees herself embodied in the female roach and embraces it, shedding her humanized form and entering oneness with natureculture as Haraway calls it. Hence, the narration of the abortion can actually be read as not a purgation of the experience, but a purgation of that which held G.H. back from accepting it, internalizing it and

thus embodying it. It is by no means an easy process, one that can only be shared with another woman who can relate:

—Mother: I killed a life, and there are no arms to receive me now and in the hours of our desert, amen. (...) I interrupted an organized thing, mother, and that is worse than killing, that made me enter through a breach that showed me, worse than death, that showed me the thick and neutral life turning yellow.

And a few lines later:

From inside the hard casing is emerging a heart thick and white and alive with pus, mother, blessed art thou amongst the roaches, now and in the hour of this thy my death, cockroach and jewel. 405

G.H.’s killing of a life is at once the abortion, the cockroach and her own “organized self,” a multiple act which takes her beyond death to an infinite materiality. As G.H. will say further on in her journey as we approach the climactic ingestion: “it was precisely removing from myself all my attributes, and going only with my living entrails. To have reached that point, I was abandoning my human organization — to enter that monstrous thing that is my living neutrality.”406

Through Lispector’s narration of G.H.’s abortion, we see how fundamental female embodiment and corporality are to the process of depersonalization G.H. undergoes. Losing her human attributes does not mean losing her body; on the contrary, she finds her sexed body, her living entrails, through the anthropophagic consumption of the cockroach-self. As Braidotti describes, G.H. becomes aware of the co-extension of her being with that of “ogni sorta di materia organica.” It is this “prehistoric” materiality that is affirmed as a fundamental part of her

405 Ibid. 93.

406 Ibid. 99.
Braidotti, like Muraro and Cavarero, and unlike many critics who have compared Lispector’s novel to Sartre, reads the emptiness G.H. recovers (“il nulla umido e vivo”) as “contrario al nulla sartriano, è un luogo di interconnessione e di interdipendenza reciproca,” with “connotazioni sessuali femminili.”

For Braidotti, the encounter and consumption of the roach will catapult G.H. out of the realm of the civilized, signaling the transgression of all confines and boundaries, bringing her face-to-face with her “essere-una-donna.”

Braidotti may have drawn from what I described as Cavarero’s “reverse-evolutionary” reading in In Spite of Plato. In “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale” Braidotti refers to the experience as a euphoric metamorphosis (“l’amore è la materia viva” as she quotes from Lispector), a communion with living matter which is the ultimate act of dehumanization. She calls G.H.’s metamorphosis anti-Kafkan for its focus on the female power of regeneration, “cioè la forza onni-inclusiva di essere sessuato femminile,” and quotes a passage from the novel which I will reproduce as well:

And I was seeing, with fascination and horror, the pieces of my rotten mummy clothes falling dry to the floor, I was watching my transformation from chrysalis into moist larva, my wings were slowly shrinking back scorched. And a belly entirely new and made for the ground, a new belly was being reborn.

Braidotti calls this transcendence of the human, whereas Cavarero discusses the path through the prehuman through a maternal continuum towards a feminine divine. Braidotti too relates the

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408 Ibid. 97.
409 Ibid. 97.
410 Ibid. 98-99.
411 Lispector, The Passion According to G.H., 72. “Belly” is translated from “ventre,” which means belly or womb. I guess Novey kept the more ambiguous term.
process to “God” as the pure expression of the joy of being, and hence concludes that G.H.’s abortion can be read, as I suggested earlier, in positive terms, as an immersion in life, in the crudeness of the material.\textsuperscript{412} The abortion, the encounter with the cockroach, leads to adoration, which Braidotti calls “migliore modalità di approccio e di percezione dell’altro.”\textsuperscript{413}

I highlight the word approccio because it is the sign of Cixous; unsurprisingly, the next section transitions into a reading of Cixous’ “L’approche de Clarice Lispector.” Braidotti calls Cixous’ reading splendid, and she mentions that Cixous translated Lispector, an issue I dealt with in Chapter One as problematic.\textsuperscript{414} For Braidotti, Cixous reads G.H.’s experience as the feminine in and as writing; in other words, écriture feminine “intese come processo di constitutione di un sistema simbolico femminile alternativo.”\textsuperscript{415} She includes an interesting new aspect to her reading of Cixous: “La passione di G.H. è la passione per una vita senza supremazia, senza potere o dominazione,” and “l’appartenenza a una materia comune: la vita,” which she reads as part of Cixous’ “ethics of approach.”\textsuperscript{416}

Braidotti moves from Cixous to Cavarero’s reading of Lispector in \textit{In Spite of Plato} (1990).\textsuperscript{417} The author reads her fellow Italian’s philosophical commentary as an affirmation of a feminist materialism. She notes the similarity of their readings in the sense that both interpret Lispector’s “life force that does not carry one’s name” as that which connects all beings;

\begin{footnotes}
\item[412] Braidotti, “Femminismo, corporeità e differenza sessuale,” 100.
\item[413] Ibid. 100.
\item[414] Ibid. 101.
\item[415] Ibid.
\item[416] Ibid.
\item[417] Braidotti wrote the foreword for \textit{In Spite of Plato}.
\end{footnotes}
Cavarero, however, sees this connection as a woman’s attempt at understanding her own sense of being outside of the patriarchal logos and therefore proposes a radical separation between being and language. As is oft mentioned of Cavarero, Braidotti points to her following Irigaray and criticizing the assimilation of the universal and the male. The notion that a “materia viva” might not require a thinking “I” to exist underlines: “la centralità della natura sessuata dell’ “io-lei” (io-femminile): il suo essere sessuata è primordiale e inscindibile da suo essere, in un modo che non è rappresentato dalla struttura grammaticale della lingua, cioè, dal suo “io.” Indeed, Lispector’s text grapples with language and it is through its breakdown, its inadequacy to represent the “great living neutrality” that is nevertheless gendered, that we reach transcendence. For Braidotti, Cavarero’s reading of Lispector helps cement that sexual difference is inherent and not contingent: “è sempre già lí.”

In what Braidotti calls an “alternative” reading of The Passion According to G.H., Luisa Muraro also follows Irigaray but in a “different direction.” We cannot infer from the text what Braidotti knew, but this statement aptly foreshadows Cavarero’s forthcoming split from Diotima. She summarizes Muraro’s reading as such: “Muraro legge La passione secondo G.H. come una esperienza mistica di trascendenza tramite la carne, verso un senso femminile del divino. È una lettura molto cristiana, in cui il corpo funziona da soglia di qualche apertura verso l’infinito.”

The brevity of Braidotti’s reading is perhaps telling of her opinion of Muraro’s *commento*. However, Muraro’s reading, like Cavarero’s, also uses Lispector’s text to point to the non-reducibility of sexual difference. Indeed, Braidotti recognizes in a subsequent paragraph that

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418 Ibid. 102.
419 Ibid. 102.
420 Ibid. 102.
Cixous, Cavarero and Muraro share the common thread of using “woman” as a foundational and 
fundamental concept from and through which a new horizon is opened for a female subject that 
is “l’immagine dell’umano e insieme del divino. La differenza sessuale necessita e comporta un 
sistema simbolico femminile alternativo.”

It is the use of “woman” by thinkers of sexual difference that led to their being labeled 
essentialist. Sexual difference posits that woman is that which has been excluded from male 
modes of representation; the very fact that woman is unrepresentable within phallocentric 
thinking is what makes (an)other system possible and necessary. Following Irigaray, thinkers 
such as Cavarero have taken up the activity of mimesis and re-elaboration of male 
representations of woman as a launching point for new representations of female subjectivity. 
Thus, as Braidotti describes, “woman” is an anchoring point from which new definitions and 
representations can emerge through an active process of becoming. The problem with sexual 
difference thinking is that it tends towards themes of transcendence and universality, a totalizing 
tendency which erases differences among women according to Braidotti. She mentions in an 
endnote that for this reason particularly vehement criticisms of sexual difference have come from 
black feminists and post-colonial critics, objections she calls extremely important and regrets not 
discussing further in the space of her essay. Braidotti’s recognition is an important contrast to the 
type of exclusion we saw in Cavarero’s anthology.

Cavarero’s anthology did not exclude, however, thinkers such as Monique Wittig, who 
Braidotti calls “una delle maggiori portavoci della scuola materialista francese che ha lanciato la
Braidotti dives into an exploration of radically different positions such as Judith Butler and Monique Wittig’s versus the embodied/bodily materialism of sexual difference in order to clarify the positions of both groups and seek points of contact. Hemmings suggests more readings like Braidotti’s, pairing supposedly opposing thinkers together. Credited with coining the use of essentialism to negatively describe sexual difference, Wittig in turn proposed the need for female sexuality to be liberated from its yoke, “woman.” Wittig, according to Braidotti, radicalizes de Beauvoir’s notion that femininity is constructed by claiming that “woman” is a male invention, contaminated and infida, and hence should be abandoned in favor of the category “lesbian.”

To Wittig, gender is an activity which creates categories such as woman, man, sex, with the political scope of reproducing compulsory heterosexuality, to borrow a phrase from Adrienne Rich. Braidotti recognizes the provocative nature of Wittig’s arguments, and compares them to Lispector:

Con spirito provocatorio, Wittig spinge all’estremo questa posizione, sostenendo che lei non è una donna; e si racconta che alla domanda se avesse una vagina, abbia risposto di no. Se si paragona questo approccio a quello del riconoscimento di Lispector di una umanità femminile - “sono la donna di tutte le donne” - si avrà un’idea della portata delle differenze in atto.

Wittig’s purpose with her provocative statements is not to denigrate being a woman; on the contrary, she wants to free both men and women from compulsory heterosexuality and to give women the freedom and power to be their own subjects. Unlike some of the thinkers of sexual difference we have discussed, Wittig confronts the universal male with a proposal to let women use the plasticity and infinite potential of language to express human/humanist values. Hence,

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423 Ibid. 104.
424 Ibid. 104-105.
425 Ibid. 105.
she liquidates sexual difference theory as biologically deterministic and essentialist and considers an alternative female symbolic unnecessary.\footnote{Ibid. 105. Summarizing Braidotti’s arguments.}

Braidotti continues her narration with Judith Butler’s response to Wittig, in which Butler notes that substituting the phallic subject with a lesbian subject is facile; Butler notes that at least the thinkers of sexual difference proposed to redefine the very parameters of subjectivity, not just a substitution of the male precedent. Braidotti notes that indeed, as a humanist, Wittig actually re-essentializes the subject, and that to Butler, Wittig’s appropriation of lesbian as the new universal subject creates a new normative model which cannot accommodate other definitions of lesbianism nor a radically new heterosexuality.\footnote{Ibid. 106.} In the end, though she critiques Wittig, Butler remains herself critical of sexual difference theory, as she is suspicious of gender as a concept and especially of “women” as the foundation of feminist politics. The normative valence of such a category is problematic. Butler, in Braidotti’s reading, opposes both Irigaray and Wittig as essentialist in that they are both universalizing something, be it the lesbian or the woman respectively. For Braidotti, both positions reveal paradoxes: the strategic essentialism in the search for a new, sexed universal versus the lesbian neo-materialism of transcending gender. Braidotti summarizes: “Essere un’omosessuale femminile, che lo sappiate o meno, o non essere affatto una donna, sebbene pensiate di esserlo: sono queste le due opzioni estreme tra cui si apre il campo della teoria femminista contemporanea.”\footnote{Ibid. 108.}

All of this discussion leads up to Braidotti’s own identification with and continued defense of sexual difference theory’s approach. Braidotti declares that sexual difference is “come
ho sostenuto prima, seguendo Irigaray e Cavarero, la strategia più adeguata a mio parere consiste nel rielaborare il cumulo di immagini, concetti, e rappresentazioni delle donne e dell’identità femminile, così come sono state codificate dalla cultura in cui viviamo.”

In her reading, we must repossess and revisit the complexities of “woman” in all its facets, as “woman” is the only identity we have in common. It is the common denominator for Braidotti, the point of departure, ambiguous and limited as it may be. Furthermore, Braidotti sees a need to call attention to the fact that identity is not the same thing as subjectivity. In her view, she is not defending psychoanalysis per se, but calling for a serious distinction between voluntary decisions and unconscious desires. She concludes that she is not ready to abandon the signifier “woman.” Instead, what is urgent for Braidotti is the need to redefine the female feminist subject. Following Donna Haraway, she sees political value in figurations (figurazioni), the images and the types of texts and language we use; figurazioni are “politically informed maps of crucial importance in this phase of the history of feminist corporeal materialism.”

Braidotti envisions the female feminist subject as the intersection of subjective desire with the will for social change. She inserts herself in a critical genealogy with Teresa de Lauretis of supporting a project that uses both “negative” criticism (i.e. deconstructing phallologocentric knowledge) and the affirmative positivity of its politics (Cavarero likewise inserts herself in this same line of thinking in “La passione della differenza” as we have seen in the previous chapter). Braidotti cites a passage from Haraway, who proposes “una teoria del soggetto sociale con un corpo femminile che si basa sulla sua storia specifica, emergente, conflittuale.”

429 Ibid. 108.
430 Ibid. 109 my translation.
431 Ibid. 110.
interconnectedness found in Lispector’s *Passion*, Braidotti believes that the feminist subject is intense, multiple and to be found within a web of interconnectivity. The job of feminist theory is how to think of identity as a place of difference and multiplicity:

Quel che è in gioco qui è come ristabilire una inter-soggettività che consenta alle differenze di creare un vincolo, cioè un contratto politico fra donne che influenzino mutamenti politici duraturi. È l’affermazione di un nuovo tipo di vincolo: una collettività che poggi sul riconoscimento delle differenze, in maniera inclusiva, cioè a dire non escludente.\(^{432}\)

To this she adds the need to unify body and mind without humanistic credos or dualistic oppositions. Braidotti opens up the question of how to develop new representations of female feminist subjectivity as well as what is “la forma di pensiero più adeguata a una umanità femminista, cioè a un soggetto collettivo femminista?”\(^{433}\)

Braidotti answers her own question by proposing, drawing on Deleuze, the “nomad” as a new modality of feminism; she believes that any feminist theory today must be “in transit,” moving, crossing, creating connections where there are none.\(^{434}\) She emphasizes the need to make an effort to move, to invent new modes of relating, to build bridges between concepts. She concludes here that there can be no lasting change without the construction of “nuovi tipi di soggetti desideranti che siano molecolari, nomadi e multipli; ritengo che sia compito di una teorica femminista opporre resistenza alla rimodifica del soggetto come un’altra entità sovrana e auto-rappresentativa, e avere invece il coraggio di affrontare le complessità, le molteplici differenze e la perdita assoluta di certezze rispetto ai fondamenti del sé.”\(^{435}\)

Unlike Cixous and

\(^{432}\) Ibid. 110.

\(^{433}\) Ibid. 110.

\(^{434}\) Ibid. 111.

\(^{435}\) Ibid. 111.
Muraro, whose conception of sexual difference remains, in a way, organized around a male/female binary, Cavarero and Braidotti propose a multiplicity of subjects as the way to move forward.

Braidotti expounds on her nomadic theory in her blockbuster book *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, first published in 1994, now on its second edition. I will be focusing my reading on her chapter on Lispector, titled “On the Female Feminist Subject: From ‘She-Self’ to ‘She-Other,” originally published as an essay in 1992, around the same time as the text we read above, hence there is significant overlap. First, what is nomadic theory? It is Braidotti’s project of redesigning subjectivity as a process—a nonunitary, multiayered vision of a dynamic and changing entity. Expressing herself with Irigaray and Deleuze, Braidotti argues that her nomadic subject project resists “methodological nationalism and is a critique of Eurocentrism from within: “Both politically and epistemically, nomadic subjectivity provokes and sustains a critique of dominant visions of the subject, identity, and knowledge, from within one of the many “centers” that structure the contemporary globalized world.” Braidotti argues, problematically, that Europe today shares with the rest of the world the “phenomenon of transculturality or cultures clashing in pluriethnic, polilingual, and multicultural social space,” without acknowledging Europe’s own role in creating the situation. She notes the struggles Europe is facing with multiculturalism, and the complexities that defy oppositional thinking (periphery vs. center). It is unfair to claim this now, from a

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437 ibid. 7-8.
438 Ibid. 8.
decolonial perspective, after the long, fraught European colonial history, as well as the continuing coloniality of power.

As she herself then notes, black, postcolonial, and feminist critics of nomadic theory have noted the paradoxes of postmodernity; those who have yet to assert their subjectivity being called upon to deconstruct subjectivity itself. She quotes herself as a feminist example, “how can we undo subjectivity we have not even historically been entitled to yet?”439 Braidotti affirms her project in the face of some “ungenerous critics”: “my nomadic subject pursues the same critique of power as black and postcolonial theories, not in spite, but because of the fact that it is located somewhere else. Philosophical nomadism addresses, in both a critical and creative manner, the role of the former “center” in redefining power relations. Margins and center shift and destabilize each other in parallel, albeit dissymetrical, movements.” Her position is unclear: first she seems to suggest that the nomadic subject seeks to de-centralize the center along with “others” (minorities/margins) not in spite of being in the center but because the nomad is “elsewhere.” This suggests that the nomad has purposefully dislocated him/herself from the center/power, hence the self-categorization of “former center.” But this self-categorization seems to suggest that instead now there is a nomadic center that was formally a formal center (in other words, the nomadic subject carries his/her power). Where is the nomad located within the “margins and center” split? She confusingly states that there is a former center, but then says that margins and center move in parallel though uneven movements. If the former power center can now move around freely, what have the margins become? If the margins are still building their subjectivities, then they are right where the nomad left them.

439 ibid. 9.
Braidotti at least clarifies her own position: “Nomadic Subjects is my contribution as a European nomadic subject, moving across the variegated landscape of whiteness, to a debate that blacks, antiracists, as well as postcolonial and other critical thinkers have put on the map,” situating herself vis-a-vis what she calls “claustrophobic self-referential Eurocentered philosophical thought.” Braidotti’s recognition is crucial to note in light of the previous thinkers we have read in this project, especially Muraro and Cavarero, whom I criticized for being self-centered in their thinking, for not theorizing beyond the local. I appreciate Braidotti’s accountability (for her embodied and embedded location). She puts forward a collective, relational practice of undoing power differentials; this is what she means by “politics of location.” She uses her own example of the impact of black feminist texts and experiences on her own understanding of the limitations of white women’s locations, truths, and discourses. In other words, theory is an interactive, continuous process, which I myself contribute to by reading Lispector in Braidotti’s own work here. The use of the nomad as a figure is still troubling in my opinion, due to some of the inevitable negative connotations of forced displacement, as well as the limited movement of many in reality; Braidotti acknowledges these critiques (I am not the first). She believes in the usefulness of hybrid, contested, multilayered figurations of which her nomad is one of many that have recently emerged. Braidotti makes the move towards thinking beyond herself, but can she escape her Eurocentricity? I will return to this question after reading her work on Lispector.

440 Ibid. 10.
441 Ibid 16.
442 Ibid. 10-12.
As Lugones found with decolonial thinking, nomadic theory necessitates, for Braidotti, feminist theory, in forming a postmodern feminist nomadic ethics. Her project is based on a new materialism that develops the corporeal by emphasizing the embodied and sexual differentiated speaking subject— neither a biological nor sociological category. Braidotti eviscerates the essentialist argument once and for all:

…feminist emphasis on embodiment goes hand in hand with a radical rejection of essentialism. In feminist theory one speaks as a woman, although the subject “woman” is not a monolithic essence, defined once and for all, but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, determined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, and sexual preference. One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically antiessentialist position.\textsuperscript{443}

In concluding her presentation of her feminist nomadic theory, she characterizes it as a form of political resistance to “hegemonic, fixed, unitary, and exclusionary views of subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{444} She offers her essays as maps that offer points of exit from phallocentric schemes of thought, maps which include attention to citation practice, politics of location, and attention to differences among women. She affirms the importance of feminist genealogies as shared discursive and political practices, as counter-memories or spaces of resistance; she simultaneously puts theory into practice by citing in the same paragraph Spivak, Rich, Irigaray, and de Lauretis.

Let’s see how this plays out in her reading of Lispector. The epigraph of the chapter is the “every woman is the woman of all women” quote, with Bradotti’s own added emphasis of italics and capitalization, in a way, re-appropriating the quotation: “\textit{Every Woman is the Woman of all women},” an appropriation that will be justified at the end of the chapter. The chapter opens with

\textsuperscript{443} Ibid. 25.
\textsuperscript{444} ibid. 58.
a description that ignores the reference to Rio de Janeiro in the text: “the story takes place at the
top of a a top building in one of the many metropolises that constitute our planet.” This is an
example of a Eurocentric notion of equating metropolises, as if Rio de Janeiro can be any other
city; this is a de-brazilification of Lispector’s text that we have seen in all of the European
readings of this project. Braidotti then summarizes G.H.’s journey in nomadic terms: “the
dissolution of the self through her encounter with dimension of experience and levels of being
that are other than her and other than human. The nomadic drift toward this impersonal state
takes the form of crossings.” The crossings are thresholds, markers of difference and otherness:
social class, ethnicity, gender, species. She replays the reading of these crossings from the essay
we read previously. The improvement here being that she uses more appropriate, sensitive
language to speak of “the absent maid” whose room G.H. enters, trespassing the boundaries of
class and ethnicity, “the maid being of a different ethnic origin than the comfortable urban,
middle class G.H.” There is still a complete lack of analysis of the racial and social undertones
of the novel, even though as I just pointed out above, Braidotti spends time recounting how black
feminism has influenced her thinking.

Braidotti reads G.H.’s experience as the total depersonalization or failure of her
socialized identity. Through the cockroach, the other, and by incorporating the abject, G.H. will,
in her reading, come to her own dehumanization. The “frame” G.H. sheds allows her expansion,
until it becomes one with “all that lives outside the human: animal, divine, even cosmic.” It is
precisely at this point that she discovers “the femaleness of her being,” the sexual difference

445 Ibid. 116.
446 Ibid. 116-117.
reading that links Braidotti to Cixous, Muraro and Cavarero, whom she will again briefly read, starting with Muraro, to whom she devotes more space than in her previous reading. Braidotti rightly states that in Muraro’s understanding, the passion is of a religious kind, but not patriarchal: “what G.H. celebrates on the top of her sacred mountain is the divinity of her gender, the mystery and grace of sexual difference meant as a specifically female experience of transcending the boundaries of the human.” We see a reappraisal of Muraro, in a more positive light; Braidotti notes Muraro’s care in avoiding phallocentric language, her goal being to “liberate feminist, female spirituality from the reductive hold of patriarchal monotheism.” This is a huge statement, considering all the the negative attention Muraro tends to receive, especially in English language texts (I am thinking particularly of Re here). “Transcendence through the flesh reasserts the force of the feminine” is the conclusion of Braidotti’s affirming reading of Muraro, who in dealing with female mysticism has faced much discrimination.

Braidotti then moves to Cavarero: “in a more secular and less mystical reading, Adriana Cavarero sees instead in the passion of G.H. the affirmation of a new, embodied feminist materialism.” In Cavarero’s reading, says Braidotti, Lispector dislocates the Western philosophical notion that being and language are one; I would add that Muraro also reads this same separation. Hence, sexual difference is not contingent: it is always there, “a given” as Cavarero put it, but has been silenced as the “other” of phallologocentric system. Braidotti then finishes her re-cap of the genealogy of sexual difference feminist readings of Lispector with Cixous, who reads the text as “a parable or women’s writing, of écriture feminine, meant as the

447 Ibid. 118.
448 Ibid.
449 Ibid. 119.
constitutive process of an alternative female symbolic system.” Braidotti reads Cixous’ “approach” as a new discourse based on the idea of respectful affinity between self and other, though as I wrote in Chapter One, Cixous’ approach was not reflected in her own writings on Clarice Lispector.

We get to Braidotti’s final observations on Lispector’s text: “G.H. is a tale about women’s ‘becoming:’ it is about new female subjectivity,” which is all about time:

In her choice of language and situations, Lispector echoes the century-old tradition of mystical ascesis, but also moves clearly out of it. G.H. symbolizes a new postmodern kind of materialism: one that stresses the materiality of all living matter in a common plane of coexistence without postulating a central point of reference or of organization for it. (...). The emphasis is on the forces, the passions, and not on the specific forms of life, In other words, I think Lispector is better read with Spinoza and Nietzsche via Deleuze than as a Christian mystic.451

I agree fully with Braidotti here: I also do not think the novel is best read as a Christian mystical experience. What Braidotti now contends is that Lispector’s text is an exemplification of the debate between feminism and postmodern discourse, in other words, “the status of thinking in general and the specific activity of theory in particular.” For Braidotti, there needs to be more balance between equality and practice of differences, as opposed to Muraro who does not see equality as a goal. “Feminism as critical thought is therefore a self-reflexive mode of analysis aimed at articulating the critique of power in discourse with the affirmation of an alternative vision of the female feminist subject.”452

We must remember that this book was first published in 1994, hence, Braidotti launches into a reading of the debates surrounding essentialism that I feel do not have to be replayed here.

450 Ibid. 119.
451 Ibid. 120.
452 Ibid. 122.
Suffice to say that she reasserts forcefully that a neomaterialist frame of reference is the key to avoiding the continued false polemics of essentialism. As the editors if *Material Feminisms* note, “Many have argued that at this point the denouncement of essentialism has become a rigid orthodoxy, more prohibitive and policing than productive. The debates over essentialism are almost always, at some level, debates about the nature and force of materiality.”

So what does Braidotti propose? She proposes that the task of thinking about new forms of female subjectivity, through sexual difference meant as the expression of women’s ontological desire, implies the transformation of the structures of thought itself, not just the content of the thoughts. This is what Karen Barad, whom I spoke of at the very beginning of this project, in my introduction, calls “agential realism,” an onto-epistemology. It all goes back to the moving body, as the overlap of the physical, symbolic and sociological. She makes a clear argument for how, echoing Foucault, sexuality is the dominant discourse of power in the West in terms of enforcing normativity, hence the embodied sexed subject must is situated in a web of complex power relations that must be understood relationally in order to be challenged; a similar argument is also made by Lugones in defining the need for the decolonial feminist project.

What is needed, according to Braidotti, is a mode of representation that would take the fact of being a woman as a positive, self-affirming political force; the political “we women” empowering the subjective becoming of each “I woman.” What forms is, therefore, a community of she-selves and she-others. The female feminist subject, hence, is the site of the intersection of subjective desire and social transformation - the primary assertion that we are more and other

453 Alaimo and Heckman, eds., *Material Feminisms*, 17. It seems to be a sign of the imbalance of power that it is when the Anglo-Americans decide that essentialism is over, it is over. Cavarero also notes the waning of the essentialist attacks in an interview, attributing it to the crisis in postmodern deconstructivism. See her interview with Alessia Ronchetti.
than “nonmen.” How, then, to engender change? In the final section of her chapter Braidotti begins to tackle this question. She brings the essay back to Lispector, “as Lispector pointed out, we are nurturing the beginning of the new; the depersonalized female subject lays the foundations for the symbolization of women’s ontological desire.” Braidotti says the first priority is to redefine the subject as a gendered unity inextricably connected to the other, which implies community and also accountability, and is, in my reading, hence fundamentally relational. This is the reason Braidotti gives for “each woman is the woman of all women,” the foundational common ground in the political task of resisting “Woman” with capital W. María Lugones also proclaims this same resistance to “Woman” with capital “W” towards the goal of becoming “resisters at the coloniality of gender.” The positive facticity of being a woman can lead, for Braidotti, to a new bond; can she bond with decolonial feminist thinking as a resister?

A human is an embodied self linked to the other, complexly, differentially intersecting, relating. What is at stake, here Braidotti quotes Cavarero, “is the representability of a feminine subject as a self-representing entity.” How to bring the multilayered subject to the fore? With a highly defined notion of singularity: only situated perspectives can legitimate new general standpoints, hence, she concludes, “in this sense, the experience of utter singularity that G.H. undergoes in her microcosm remains emblematic of the process of women becoming other than the “Woman” they were expected and socialized into being. G.H. shows us paths of transcendence specific to our gender and to women’s own, discontinuous time of becoming.”

To round out my discussion of Lispector in Braidotti’s work I will now turn to her most recent readings: “Clarice Lispector as the anti-Kafka” in Metamorphoses (2002) and a brief

454 Ibid. 136.
mention in *Transpositions* (2006). The chapter in *Metamorphoses* overlaps significantly with both of her previous readings of Lispector. The same epigraph we just spoke of in the paragraph above reappears, albeit in a different translation: “Every woman is the woman of all women, every man is the man of all men and each of them could present her/himself wherever the human is at stake.” The passage is credited as such: “Clarice Lispector, *La Passion selon G.H.*, p. 193.” This is odd indeed: why is a passage in English, attributed to a Brazilian author, referenced to in the French edition? If one looks in the bibliography, the 1989 Ronald Sousa translation in English is cited along with the French, however, his translation is different than the one printed. It is quite difficult to understand what is going on with the translations here, perhaps Braidotti herself translated from the French? If so, she should/would mention it. In the body of her reading, Braidotti also alternates between referring to the title of the novel in English and in French, which makes it seem like the novel was written in French; I discussed this french-fusion issue at length in Chapter One and, unfortunately, here we see it at work. I appreciate that Braidotti speaks French and not Portuguese, and perhaps that is the version she read, but in quoting Lispector’s work in an English text I see no reason for the inclusion of the French translation as reference at all. It may seem like a minor detail to harp on, but details matter. They produce meaning.

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456 In the 1989 Sousa translation: “Every woman is the woman of all women, every man is the man of all men, and every one of them could appear wherever humankind is judged.” (168). In the 2012 Novel translation it reads, “Every woman is the woman of all women, every man is the man of all men, and each of them could appear wherever man is judged.” (184). In the original, “Toda mulher é a mulher de todas as mulheres, todo homem é o homem de todos os homens, e cada um deles poderia se apresentar onde quer que se julgue o homem.” (174).
Braidotti improves on a few of her descriptions of the novel, these initial paragraphs of the chapter seemingly an amalgamation of her previous two texts on Lispector: here what she previously described as any metropolis is now again called “a modern South-American metropolis,” which still conflates all South American cities and erases Brazilianness. She describes the “plot” of the novel in her idiosyncratic thematic terms: “This voyage across the multi-layered structure of her subjectivity is a process of affirmative deconstruction or mimetic repetition, that opens up for the protagonist unsuspected paths of becoming.”\(^{457}\) However, we see the return of the description of Janair and G.H. from her first reading of Lispector which I discussed in detail earlier in this chapter: “The action takes place on the maid’s day off: the maid is a native Brazilian woman, dark-skinned and absolutely not as Eurocentric as G.H..”\(^{458}\) G.H. is further described as “wealthy white woman.” Janair is Afro-Brazilian, and she quit the day before; the degrees of Eurocentricity of Janair and G.H. are as a category equivocal and absurd. It is, from my decolonial material feminist perspective, unacceptable to find the return of this description in 2002, especially after what Braidotti claims in her introduction to *Metamorphoses*:  

The fact that the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration goes to the heart of the European history of philosophy and of the ‘metaphysical cannibalism’ of European thought makes it a foundational concept. It has been colonized by hierarchical and exclusionary ways of thinking, which means that historically it has also played a constitutive role not only in events that Europe can be proud of, such as the Enlightenment, but also in darker chapters of our history, such as in European fascism and colonialism. Because the history of difference in Europe has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, it is a notion of which critical intellectuals must make themselves accountable. Feminist ethics and politics of location can be of inspiration in meeting this challenge.\(^{459}\)

\(^{457}\) Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 160.

\(^{458}\) Ibid.

\(^{459}\) Ibid. 12.
In her readings of Lispector, Braidotti still does not fully locate Janair and G.H.’s difference within the coloniality of power; instead, she locates them along an axis of Eurocentricity. As one decolonial critic forcefully notes: “Braidotti’s nomadic ethics shows how a radical thinking falls easily into the trap of Eurocentrism when it fails to take into account the colonial difference and the bottomless dimension of the historical trauma, which cracks open the ontological ground of the colonial subject who drifts ‘between the first innumerable long-ago and the second all too easily enumerated present.’”

Braidotti’s text repeats her previous readings, with the telling change of leaving out Luisa Muraro’s reading — here Braidotti only reads Cavarero and Cixous. What is new in this reading is her proposal to “spell out instead a possible nomadic reading of the passion play performed by G.H.” She describes the process G.H. undergoes as Deleuze and Guattari’s “encounter of ‘haecceities,’ single individualities that share certain attributes and can merge with each other because of them. This process is described as becoming-inorganic,” and through her encounter with the roach G.H.’s prehistoric materiality is asserted. This deeply rooted affinity with the living matter is, for Braidotti, the amazing outcome of this revelation/metamorphosis: “This rediscovery of the life in her takes the form of the transcendence of the human: anti-Kafka in her power of regeneration, female in her generative force, yet beyond the psycho-sexual identity of Woman.”

Braidotti’s new nomadic reading is an application of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory

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462 Ibid.

463 Ibid. 166.
of becoming to Lispector’s text, an approach of applying theory from West/North to texts from non-West/South that can be problematic if not sensitive to cultural translations, which so far, Braidotti’s has been uneven.

After becoming-inorganic G.H. becomes imperceptible, as in, she melts into what Braidotti calls the “sacred as life: zoe, and bios reunited in becoming.” She proposes a Deleuzian reading of “the novel La pasion selon G.H. in terms of the sequence becoming woman-animal-insect-imperceptible,” but then sets her own reading apart from Deleuze’s by emphasizing that the progression is “very gender-specific, as are the cross-references to body-parts and body-fluids that mark this process. It is radical immanence of and in the body.” Lispector herself uses the word immanence, as I previously noted, in the same “woman of all women passage.” I read Lispector’s meaning as Braidotti does, in that men and women can interchangeably be judged only in immanence, in other words, in their flesh. Lispector’s text reads “But only in immanence, because only a few reach the point of, in us, recognizing themselves,” which seems to suggest something beyond the radical immanence of the flesh (souls?)…but that is for us to continue pondering. In her conclusion to this chapter of Metamorphoses, Braidotti distances herself from Deleuze and trends that aim at gender neutrality or sexual indifferentiation in that she confirms the importance of “the politics of location and of sexual difference as marking asymmetrical positions between the sexes. The positioning that comes from our embodied and historically located subjectivities also determines the sort of political maps and conceptual diagrams we are likely to draw.”

464 Ibid. 167.
In *Transpositions*, Braidotti builds on her feminist rereading of Deleuzian becomings and seeks to establish an ethical accountability of philosophical nomadism. She includes Lispector in one line: “Becoming-imperceptible is the ultimate stage in the becoming-woman, in that it marks the transition to a larger, ‘natural,’ cosmic order. Clarice Lispector describes it as an *oratorium*, a song of praise and of acceptance of all that is.”\(^{465}\) As she does not cite Lispector in her bibliography, we are left to assume that the reader knows Lispector from Braidotti’s previous work or elsewhere; Braidotti does state that *Transpositions* is closely interrelated to *Metamorphoses*. Critiques of Braidotti’s work from decolonial (and other) perspectives center on the issue of her Eurocentricity and rejection of negativity. An Yountae asks in her reading of Braidotti’s appropriation of Caribbean poet-philosopher Edouard Glissant in *Transpositions*: “should not the call for accountability and mourning for the loss and suffering of others precede the joyful celebration of freedom and nomadic ontology? Should not the question of the other be at the center of ethics rather than the preoccupation for one’s endless becoming?”\(^{466}\)

Yountae argues that Braidotti fails to escape from the trap of Eurocentrism by not taking into consideration the ontological trauma of the colonial subject:

…the unfathomable dimensions of pain and suffering caused by the colonial trauma. Despite the innovative nature and the radical political aim of her argument, and despite her acknowledgement of the conditions of postcoloniality, I am in disagreement with the direction she takes in order to advance the key principles of her philosophical nomadism. For many racialized/colonized subjects who have experienced slavery, displacement, and diasporisation, the pain of loss is neither a mere set of negative feelings nor a historical memory that needs to be overcome or transcended.\(^{467}\)


\(^{467}\) Ibid.
Along with the colonial trauma, Yountae, reading Gedalof, sees the nomadic model as “really only available to white Western feminists” who can travel freely. Following Wuthnow’s and Gedalof’s voices of warning against Braidotti’s overcelebration of movement, Yountae objects to “the unmarked facileness embedded in Braidotti’s account of ‘transposing the loss’ and of constructing a non-unitary subject. Especially, reflecting from Glissant’s context, a social fabric characterized by the omnipresence of loss, discontinuity, and socio-ontological trauma, remembering the past is a crucial move that enables people to come to terms with the present, even before any form of subject position takes place.” As Claudia de Lima Costa puts it, “knowing the past is a crucial part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization.”

As her readings of Clarice Lispector have also, in my reading, shown, one of the main problems with Braidotti’s feminist nomadism is her focus on the “self’s endless becoming” as Yountae calls it, instead of placing concern for the other at the core of her ethics. Yountae productively uses Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s essay “On the Coloniality of Being” as a juxtaposition to Braidotti’s notion of transposing: “every event contains within it the potential for being overcome and overtaken – its negative charge can be transposed.” For Yountae, reading

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469 Yountae, 291. “Braidotti might be right in remarking that Glissant transformed the pain of loss into the active production of new and multiple forms of identity. However, I argue that her reference to Glissant is problematic as the simple description of ‘overcoming the sense of loss and fragmentation’ does not adequately describe Glissant’s agenda. For Glissant, the very womb that gives rise to the beginning of a new world is the abyss which, as its etymological root of ‘bottomlessness’ indicates, represents the sense of ‘groundlessness’ shaping the fabric of the colonised reality.”


471 Ibid. 292.

Maldonado-Torres, “if what conditions the authenticity of existence, of what Heidegger calls
*Dasein* is the inescapability and singularity of one’s own death, for the racialized subject, death
has a different impact as death is not an individualized feature of their reality. (…) the coloniality
of being consists of the omnipresence of death: the decolonial struggle emerges ‘not through an
encounter with one’s own immortality, but from a desire to evade death, one’s own but even
more fundamentally that of others.’” Yuntae thinks Braidotti does not give the appropriate
weight (in reading Glissant) to the coloniality of being, it is not so *easily* transposed. In
Braidotti’s defense, she does state that “In a nomadic, Deleuzian-Nietzschean perspective, ethics
is essentially about transformation of negative into positive passions, i.e. moving beyond the
pain. This does not mean denying the pain, but rather activating it, working it through. Again,
the positivity here is not supposed to indicate a facile optimism or a careless dismissal of human
suffering.” To me, it is this sense of community wrought by the *coloniality of being* that
brought together, for example, the women of the Grupo Latino-Americano de Mulheres em
Paris, whose story I told in Chapter One in an effort to include the counter-memory of, first and
foremost their existence, and second their theory and practice of embodied, intersectional,
decolonial feminism long before such terms came into being. I declare from my Transloca
perspective that a decolonial feminist ethics is fundamentally based on caring for others, because
we are self and other in one, in motion.

Braidotti positions her nomadic subject as signifying “the potential becoming, the
opening out, the transformative power of all the exploited, marginalized, oppressed minorities.

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473 Ibid. 293. Maldonado-Torres, N. 2007. ‘On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the

Just being a minority, however, is not enough: it is only the starting point. What is crucial to becoming-Nomad is undoing the oppositional dualism majority/minority and arousing an affirmative passion for and desire for the transformative flows that destabilize all identities.\textsuperscript{475} She recognizes that for “real life minorities” however a phase of “identity politics” and “claiming a fixed location” is “inevitable and necessary because you cannot give up something you have never had. Nor can you dispose nomadically of a subject position that you have never controlled to begin with.”\textsuperscript{476} Therefore, problematically, Braidotti’s “becoming-nomad” seems to be the telos of the processes of becoming-minority and/or becoming-woman. First one becomes minority/woman, \textit{then} one can be “free” to become-nomad. Braidotti claims that the process “is internally differentiated and it depends largely on where one starts from. The politics of location is crucial.”\textsuperscript{477} Hence, the Eurocentric starting place remains privileged spatially and temporally.

It seems that this privilege is part of difference, which Braidotti does not ignore; she insists that mapping and politics of location can account for differences and offer insights into sites of resistance:

The differences in degrees, types, kinds and modes of mobility, rootlessness, exile and nomadism need to be mapped out with precision and sensitivity. This cartographic accuracy is made necessary by the fact that nomadism is precisely not a universal metaphor, but rather a generic term of indexation for qualitatively different degrees of access and entitlement to socially empowering (or not) subject-positions in an historical era, for people who are situated in one of the many poly-located centers which weave together the global economy. Power is the key issue here, and mobility is one of the terms which indexes access to it. Embodied and embedded subject-positions are the key issue at stake.\textsuperscript{478}


\textsuperscript{476} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{477} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{478} Rosi Braidotti, “Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited,” 55-56.
I wonder if it is possible to impose mapping on a nomadic concept of subjectivity: there seems to be an issue of quantum relativity. How does one capture a subjectivity that is in motion, that is always becoming? How do you map a process? The map can only really be retrospective (where one has been), or it is a momentary photograph of where one is—a pause in the multiple processes—a “you are here” that changes instantly, as Lispector herself tries incessantly to capture in Água Viva: “Let me tell you: I’m trying to seize the fourth dimension of the instant-now so fleeting that it’s already gone because it’s already become a new instant-now that is also already gone. Every thing has an instant in which it is. I want to grab hold of the is of the thing.”

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479 Lispector, Água Viva, (New York: New Directions, 2012) 3. One could read Água Viva as Lispector’s attempt at using language to capture that which she reached through depersonalization in The Passion According to G.H, as a follow-up of sorts, post-passion....Lispector writes “But no passion suffered in pain and love is not followed by a hallelujah.” (4). And indeed the extraordinary book itself opens with “It’s with such profound happiness. Such a hallelujah. Hallelujah, I shout, hallelujah merging with the darkest human howl of the pain of separation but a shout of diabolic joy. Because no one can hold me back now.” (3).
CONCLUDING REMARKS:

POINTS OF CONTACT

“You can only map a process when you understand that the map and the mapping are inseparable; in other words, the embodied subject exists onto-epistemologically. As Lispector herself says, “for the journey exists, and the journey is not simply a matter of going. We ourselves are the journey.” Lispector’s journey is non-teleological, it is creative evolution as process, a continual becoming. It is non-deterministic, as Lispector’s ending is fundamentally left open. Indeed, we cannot say that the novel ends, the dashes disappearing into a new space of being. The figuration that exists in the new space does not matter so much; as Braidotti says, “the figuration of nomadic subjects should never be taken as a new universal metaphor for the human

480 “Clarice, I do not read you for the literature, but for life.”

or posthuman condition,” instead, “a figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self— it’s no metaphor.” It matters that it is matter, it is based on a body.

A transformative account of the self is a story. We map ourselves the only way we can: through language. We narrate. Far from simple, we keep trying, as Lispector exhorts us to —and I never tire of quoting:

I have to the extent I designate—and this is the splendor of having a language. But I have much more to the extent I cannot designate. Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it—and the way I do not find it. But it is from searching and not finding that what I did not know was born, and which I instantly recognize. Language is my human effort. My destiny is to search and my destiny is to return empty-handed. But—I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what I could not achieve.

This is what Lispector knew, from early on: for better or worse, language is what we have, which does not mean we experience less; it means we have to keep searching for a way to express ourselves. G.H.’s journey of gendered, embodied depersonalization to transcendence and oneness through the failure of language as mediation is at the core of the foundations of the feminist thinking of Hélène Cixous, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rosi Braidotti. This is a remarkable fact. These points of contact generated a micro-genealogy of Lispectorian thinkers of sexual difference. Reading Lispector has functioned, as we have seen, as an initiation into feminist philosophical thinking and praxes, after which Lispector becomes, to varying degrees among them, a staple of their writing.

The fact that a Brazilian woman writer is at the heart of a major vein of contemporary European feminist thought has also generated complex points of contact with Latin American

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decolonial feminist thought, histories of feminisms, material feminisms, and issues of translation and circulation. I have practiced creative strategies throughout this transdisciplinary project to install counter-memories, to provide information, to disrupt, to reinsert, to translate, to read, to re-read, to question, to relate. My conclusion is that there is no conclusion, only inclusion. We must keep including, figuring out what that means, how to do it, and do it. As the thinkers we have read have taught us, we need to experiment, not just think. Relate. Practice.

Lispector takes language as far as it can go, beyond the limits of the human, to the unsayable; the inescapable process is an onto-epistemological account of overcoming phallogocentric language:

And it is no use to try to take a shortcut and want to start, already knowing that the voice says little, starting straightaway with being depersonal. For the journey exists, and the journey is not simply a manner of going. We ourselves are the journey. In the matter of living, one cannot arrive beforehand. The via crucis is not a detour, it is the only way, one cannot arrive except along it and with it. Persistence is our effort, giving up is the reward. One only reaches it having experienced the power of building, and, despite the taste of power, preferring to give up. Giving up must be a choice. Giving up is the most sacred choice of a life. Giving up is the truly human instant. And this alone, is the very glory of my condition.

Phallogocentric thinking is powerful. Phallogocentric language is powerful. Lispector knows it, she uses it. But she sees power for what it is, and chooses to give it up. But can power be relinquished, refused, undesirable?484 Do we have a choice? Only some of us? Or, as Bradotti puts it, “Is the positivity of difference, sometimes called ‘positive difference,’ thinkable? What are the conditions that may facilitate the thinkability of positive difference?”485 In other words,

484 Lispector, 186.
485 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 17.
can we live in a world that positively different? Can we adore difference? Can power be positive?

G.H./Lispector breaks free from her casing, her frame that separated her from the world, “Finally, finally my casing had really broken and without limit I was.”\(^{486}\) She gives up power and discovers that “the world independent on me.”\(^{487}\) This is the key to her ethics, not approach. It resonates, as Thiele puts it, “with the intra-active plane of the manifold entangled relations of Barad’s quantum ontology in which ‘we are of the universe—there is no inside, no outside.’”\(^{488}\) Thiele sees an ethicality in Barad’s formulation that “no longer aspires to an (always failing) responsibility for the other, with the subsequent question of which responsibility to choose in order not to either appropriate otherness into sameness or patronize others via protectionism. It instead suggests “a response-ability with others.”\(^{489}\) As embodied resisters at the coloniality of gender we become allies, which really means the we are response-able with each other. Thiele writes that “there will never be an innocent starting point for any ethics-political quest because ‘we’ are always/already entangled with-in everything.”\(^{490}\) With accountability and recognition of differences and the complexities of the coloniality of being, we can keep moving towards affirmative decolonial material feminist goals. And as the Translocas propose, we have to start

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\(^{486}\) Lispector, 189.

\(^{487}\) Ibid. 189.


\(^{489}\) Ibid.

\(^{490}\) Ibid.
with translation. While we keep working towards a non-phallogocentric language we still have to find ways to talk to each other, to build “connectant epistemologies.” Polyglot networks.

We can connect because we are points of contact living in the symbiotic existence of *natureculture*. Bodies are points of contact, as are ideas, which spring forth from the symbiotic reality of your mind. This project has been about creative, non-deterministic evolution all along: the evolution of Clarice Lispector’s feminist reception, the creative, interwoven evolution of the work of Cixous, Muraro, Cavarero and Braidotti, the evolution of material and decolonial feminisms, and, most of all, the evolution of me, Mariana Fraga. As Lispector says at the end of *Água viva*: “what I’m writing you goes on and I am bewitched.” I hope that the points of contact of these pages will continue evolve and symbiotically procreate - *positively create the new* - in your mind. I know that for me, this is not the end; it is the beginning.

I have a story to tell you:

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