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# The Politics of "Diotima"

Renate Holub

As of the mid-eighties, a group of women philosophers, mostly from the Northern Italian city of Verona, rigorously emerge from the Italian feminist cultural landscape. They call themselves "Diotima," quite consciously fill their rank and file with more than just academic women, center their arguments primarily on the concepts of "sexual difference," of feminine epistemologies and ethics leading to absolute feminine freedom, privilege encounters with the classical philosophical texts of the Western tradition, formulate the contours of a social-symbolic politics, of a feminist political practice designed to realize forms of freedom for women, and seem to, depending on one's point of view, either loosely align themselves with, or function exclusively as the elite think tank of the Libreria delle donne di Milano, one of the many public and controversial women's centers that have established themselves since the beginnings of second-wave feminism in Italy.<sup>1</sup> "Diotima's" gesture of distinctly naming itself, focusing on a set of foundational concepts, privileging Western

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philosophy as an object of knowledge, demanding a political strategy, constituting itself as a democratic collective and aligning itself with a feminist center—in this case a quite powerful and influential one—perhaps even functioning as the theoretical, if embattled, avant-garde of a largely socially differentiated women's movement in the Italian North—all of these things seem to be nothing new to those initiated in one way or another to the trajectory of second-wave feminism in Italy. By evoking the term "the trajectory of Italian second-wave feminism" I do not mean to suggest that there exists simply one form of Italian feminism, or that there is simply one way of reading that social and cultural text.<sup>2</sup> Recorded and unrecorded histories of Italian second-wave feminism alike, as they have positioned themselves in the public sphere over the last decade and a half, and as they continue to flourish on private grounds, surely attest to the many ways of reading the vicissitudes, the victories, and the defeats of Italian second-wave feminism. And there are multiple ways in which feminism, as a movement, in its victories and defeats, has affected the structure of women's life-world, women's interaction with each other, and women's interaction with the symbolic and not-so-symbolic state and cultural apparatuses. Yet the multiplicity of heterogeneous experiential designs, often evoked, in particular, in the context of Italian feminism, is also marked by a set of rather simple and straightforward events, which were neither simply nor straightforwardly accomplished, but which potentially guarantee more freedom for many women: the right to divorce, abortion rights, the new family law, and the current struggles for the Law on Sexual Violence.<sup>3</sup> Between the heterogeneities of feminist experiences, positions, and politics and the actual political gains of Italian women, there are the contours of a trajectory of a feminist movement which, no matter how we tell its story, seems to bespeak a cultural specificity of its own. "Diotima," with its predilection for a couple of foundational concepts, such as "sexual difference" and, by implication, "the generation of absolute freedom," its privileging of Western philosophy as an object of knowledge in a feminist discourse, its focusing on non-Italian philosophers—on Descartes, Hegel, and Freud—when engaging with the classical philosophical canon, yet also with its insistence on a political agenda that cannot do and refuses to do without agency and, thus, civic responsibility and communicative ethics is, so I would argue, telling of the ways in which Italian feminism has tended to do business for a while, and telling of the ways in

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which Italian feminism, in spite of its heterogeneous nature, differs from the major feminist contours of other cultures in the West.

By referring to the apparently rather stable cultural and representational business practices of Italian feminism, I do not mean to suggest that Italian feminism displays a timeless, universal specificity, impervious to the general trends in Italian culture and society at large which are, as one might expect, not unrelated to trends in Western culture in general. Indeed, the history of Italian feminism is, as most feminisms in the West, tied to the general adventures of its culture, its politics, its economics, and most accounts acknowledge that much. Italian feminism emerges by the late sixties—next to the student movement and the enormous social and political gains of the working class unions—and formulates its desires with a theoretical apparatus deeply indebted to the neo-Marxist canon and the Frankfurt School. The first feminist groups, such as Gruppo Demau, standing for “Demystification of Authoritarianism” or Rivolta Femminile, “Feminine Revolt,” reflect, by the very choice of their names, some of the privileged vocabularies of the period. Italian women made, next to the political and economic advances of the working class, enormous political and cultural gains by the early seventies, manifesting itself in cultural enterprises such as publications, publishing houses, radio stations, and spaces expressly set up for women. Simultaneously, and precisely because of the general politicization of the public sphere, Italian feminists were caught, at the beginning and the middle of the seventies, between their commitment to left politics on the one hand, and their commitment to feminist politics and culture on the other hand. This struggle, which has sometimes been identified by the term “double militancy,” was somewhat exhausted by the later seventies. This is, of course, also roughly the moment in which the left in Italy, after enormous political and social gains, reflected in the dynamic culture of the early to mid-seventies, retreats, or is forced to retreat, depending on one’s analytical preferences. This is the moment in which, as I like to state it, “Nietzsche replaces Marx, body replaces class, and the genealogy the dialectic.” As, under the banner of a “crisis of reason,” Italy of the late seventies bans from its general realm of cultural experiences and desires collective endeavors from its subjectivist horizon of expectations, thereby renewing philosophical vocabularies of existentialist provenance, Italian feminism, in this historical account, both similarly retreats into privacy and some-

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times perhaps even into silence, while simultaneously maintaining, however, a minimum of practical philosophy. That is to say, while the cultural workers of "soft philosophies"—as Italy steadily advances to a position as one of the major Western technological and economic powers—minimize the possibilities of a political project, appositively critiquing the realm of human agency and responsibility, and downplaying their privileged status in their society and in their world, many Italian feminists insist on maximizing the possibilities of a political project, on human agency, and on playing up their underprivileged status in their society. Surely, this kind of politics does not primarily focus on public institutions, on the educational system, on cultural establishments, on the family, as earlier feminists defined the terrain of their political activism. Rather, this kind of politics focuses on human interaction, more precisely, on the interaction between women and the social-symbolic potential of that relationship, on a feminist ethics.

Italian feminism clearly does not generate itself outside its cultures. What is not so clear is which cultural track of the many tracks it is on. As part of the Western hegemonic culture, Italy, including its feminism, has not escaped, does not escape, nor does it have any reason or desire to escape the effects of the extraordinarily powerful hegemonic cultural stock exchange, which, as of late, efficaciously (rationally, that is) trades traditional or so-called modern regimes of truth with new or so-called post-modern rationalities. The logistics of this late-twentieth-century version of a "querelles des anciens et des modernes," in no way inferior, with its at times conceptually self-righteous dogmatism, illiterate reductivism, political opportunism, and corporate orthodoxy, to earlier contests of the sort in the seventeenth or the thirteenth century, are by now known to most shareholders of the critical business on both sides of the exchange. There is no reason to reproduce some of it here. Let it suffice by saying that Italy, with the Taylorized productions and skillful overseas marketing of, among other things, the "pensiero debole" of Vattimo & Co., not only holds (and why should it not?) as one of the major economic powers of the Western hemisphere, its profitable accounts in the post-modern cultural corporations of late capitalism. Italy also, and for me more importantly, accrues extraordinary profits by the very activities and political program of "Diotima" in the cultural and social capital of Western feminism. Whether these profits are indeed re-investable in some form or another on our own cultural

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grounds here in the U. S.—given the difficulties, the displacements, and the reductionisms that often inform the import and export of cultural commodities—is one of the questions I will briefly address as I conclude this brief discussion of the politics of “Diotima.”<sup>4</sup> More immediate is the question as to what “Diotima” does and what it wants. The way in which “Diotima” does business, the language it uses when writing its programs, stating its positions, and seeking alliances, what it conceptually, epistemologically, and ethically promotes and what it refuses to promote, the goals it sets for itself and the politics it pursues, indicate to me, however, that what appears to be a universal squabble between “modern-speak” or “post-modern-speak” is, in the context of “Diotima,” at best of secondary importance, and at worst of no relevance at all. While “Diotima” surely emerges in an era that knows of the contest of the modern with the post-modern, while it adopts many a scheme from one of the major and, to me, most attractive goddesses of the Western post-modern pantheon—I am referring to Luce Irigaray—its political message knows of the non-divine, the human context within which it arises: the boundaries and the possibilities of Italian cultural, educational, economic, legal, and social apparatuses, that constitute the material, symbolic, and imaginary structure of the life-world of many women.<sup>5</sup> I doubt that “Diotima” was interested in evoking Marx’s famous preface to the “Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy” when it notes that it is not theory that makes or determines life, but life—in this case cultural life—that makes theory.

With or without Marx, those Italian feminist theorists who, reflecting on their own history over the last few decades and a half, reproduce the origins or the genealogy of the theory and practice of sexual difference and of the path that leads to freedom as theoretically stated and promoted by “Diotima,” rigorously view their theories as a result of their experiences in everyday life, rather than the other way around (as a cause, that is). Laws of causation are distinctly observed in this rigorously linear narrative. Indeed, in a collective publication of the Libreria delle donne di Milano, the Women’s Bookstore of Milan, entitled *Non credere di avere dei diritti* and subtitled *La generazione della liberta femminile nell’idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne*, which rehearses the history of Italian feminism from its fabulous beginnings in the late sixties to recent developments, no less fabulous, in the middle of the eighties, the problematic of the dialectical relation of theory to praxis, long the Achilles heel of all kinds of critical theories, expe-

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riences here something of a rigorous re-formulation.<sup>6</sup> Whether it adds to or detracts from the powers of critical theory in the long run is not to the point. What is to the point and what matters in the story of the Women's movement in Italy, as presented and emphasized by the Women's Bookstore of Milan, are first and foremost not the readings of feminist texts, the authorities of leading feminists, or the appropriation of theoretical apparatuses, but the experiences of everyday life of Italian feminists of all walks of life. The Women's Bookstore Collective substantiates this proposition of matter over idea, of material, collective experience over individual contemplation, of the primacy of praxis over theory, by non-negotiably ousting references to individual theorists or theoretical apparatuses from the text, by insisting on collective bodies rather than individual ones, by subscribing to knowledges that are gathered on public rather than private grounds, and by adopting a language and a rhetoric of everyday life conspicuously devoid, so it seems to an outsider, of those algebraic linguisticities known to many as "post-modern-speak." However, while complex linguistic choices surely can redress the complexity of a message, it does not have to do so. And conversely, simplicity in language is no guarantee for simplicity in or of thought. I do not think that I have to substantiate my assertion here. The linguistic choices of the Women's Bookstore Collective are made in favor of simplicity. The conceptual choices, and the modalities of their logic, are not. The story of Italian feminism told by the Collective is a fascinating performance of a feminist drama, where Italian women have inexorably moved from non-freedom to freedom in something like a superbly structured three-act play: unimpaired by sophisticated theoretical structures, by ideal or subjectivist interventions, or simply by historical accidents, Italian women have, on the basis of their very experiences in the micrological structures of everyday life, recognized that there is a non-freedom implied by simply "being-in-themselves-in-sexually-undifferentiated-fashion." This "being-in-themselves-in-sexually-undifferentiated-fashion," this non-freedom or stage one of the feminist historical drama, has been overcome and mediated onto a higher and more advanced stage of "being-for-themselves-in-sexually-differentiated-fashion" in that a second stage has antithetically opposed the originary stage by "being-for-the-other/s-in-difference." Or to put it more directly: stage one of "being in itself" (*an sich sein*), without a recognition of sexual difference, has been opposed by a stage two of "being-for-the-other" in sexual, social,

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cultural, and symbolic difference, which alone can realize the potentially authentic freedom of "being-for-itself" (*fuër sich sein*) in sexual difference. Does this sound like a feminist scenario of Hegel's master-slave dialectic? It surely does. And indeed, as in Hegel's rigorous three-stage drama of the absolute spirit, the subject of the linear trajectory from inauthenticity to freedom of the Italian feminist phenomenology, Italian women that is, had, from the very beginning, so in the account of the Women's Bookstore Collective, no choice but to follow the inexorable necessity of their dialectical history. For from the days of the first collectives of Italian feminism, the Gruppo Demau of 1967, or of Rivolta Femminile in the early seventies, to the events of the mid-seventies, to the rise of the myriad of consciousness-raising groups, and alternative practices of the unconscious, and from the many public debates on abortion law and the Law on Sexual Violence to incisive meetings in Pinarella or Paestum, and to the discovery of models of feminine freedom in the reading of women's literature, a significant tangent of the Italian women's movement, in particular of the autonomous women's movement, so we are told in indirect terms, was materially driven towards the absolute knowledge of essentialist freedom embedded in the social-symbolic practices of sexual difference. By historical necessity, that social-symbolic practice of sexual difference alone is capable of overcoming the non-essentialism of emancipatory, egalitarian, and liberatory rhetorics which has kept the spirit of the Italian women's movement unfree in its non-acknowledgment of sexual difference.

Surely I am somewhat overstating the point. Hegel's shadows are not as transparent in the linear narrative of the Women's Bookstore Collective of Milan as I make them out to be. The Collective emphasizes, more than once, that it is merely one of many stories that is being told, the story of a particular feminist group among many feminist groups that make up Italian feminism. And one can profitably read it as such. Yet there is more than one reason why I think that discrepancies between intentionality and performance outweigh expressly stated harmonies. For one, the story told by the Collective is not simply an Italian story, in that the need to address relations among women rather than simply being with women has also been part of our experiences outside of Italy. I have discussed some of these historical similarities elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> And two, and for my purposes here more importantly, the dialectization of the story of the Italian women's movement, as it appears on the expressly untheoretical pages of the Collec-

tive, is brought into sharp focus in the highly theoretical forms of knowledge put forth in the various publications of "Diotima." I will only address the latter point.

"Diotima's" invention is a feminist theoretical model based on a specific understanding of sexual difference, namely of its affirmation. It promises individual and social freedom for all women. This model, mostly based on Luce Irigaray's notion of an ethics of sexual difference, is both epistemological and ethical, as well as ontological. Its central questions are these: How can woman become a subject? How is it possible that she love herself, if indeed her effective situation is to be in exile, is to be to love the man, the children, the house? How can women be a subject if the symbolic, the linguistic, the conceptual within which she moves is not of her own making? How can she be a subject if she is the negated other of the theory of the subject of Western phallogocentric discourse? How can she be a subject if she fuses with her origins, the mother, who too is excluded from the symbolic, rather than positively relating to her origins in difference? The notion of Subject is conceived, as in Hegel's notion of "ethicality" or "*Sittlichkeit*," both as an individual and a social category. Yet "Diotima's" ethics of sexual difference is also a corrective to Hegel's notion of ethicality. In Hegel's understanding of the subject, men represent the universal individual in that they, devoid of natural determinacy, create the world of human law and human community. Women, as generators of life, as the embodiment of family and thus of religious community, represent the particular individual and divine law. As wives and thus part of the institution of the family, women guarantee, without being it, universal individuality or the subject. They take part in it, but only indirectly. So woman/wife represents divine law, while simultaneously being neither free nor a subject. She can be a subject, as sister to a brother, as Antigone was to Polynices. In this narrative taken from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which "Diotima" narrates on the basis of Irigaray, woman loses not once but twice when it comes to her subjecthood. Not only can she not be a subject when she realizes what she ought to realize, the representation of divine law qua generator of life (as wife of a citizen who is part of a human community), she can also not be a subject when she departs from the human community (when she refuses to be a wife and a production machine for children). "Diotima" transforms this double loss into a feminist advantage. Woman can become a subject by retrieving the originary mother, not by fusing

or merging with her origins, her originary mother, but rather by establishing a distance, a distinctly differentiated relation to and with the mother, indeed a hierarchical relation, perhaps a relation of power. This retrieving of the originary mother is both actual and symbolic. It is actual by inactivating the originary relation of mother to daughter, an unequal relation given the original physical, psychic, and emotional advantage the mother has over the daughter; it is symbolic in that this inactivating takes place in relations with and to other women. The non-fusion with the origins thus takes place on two axes, in both instances emphasizing differences among women, the inactivating of which generates the possibilities of subjecthood and thus freedom.<sup>8</sup> In this sense Hegel's notion of woman/mother/wife as non-subject and representation of divine law turns into woman/mother as generators of human law. The ethics of sexual difference, consciously inactivating mother/daughter and daughter/mother relations among women as eternal replay of the originary mother/daughter relation, generates a new sociality, a new symbolics, a new language, a new human community. It changes the status of women from a sex that is not one into a sex that is one.

"Diotima" has been attacked on various occasions for not addressing the lesbian question in its discussion of its ethics of sexual difference.<sup>9</sup> And its rank and file, the Women's Bookstore of Milan, has been attacked for not supporting the struggle for changing the Law on Sexual Violence.<sup>10</sup> I think that my narrative of "Diotima's" theoretical model is ample explanation as to why it neither theoretically promotes a discourse on lesbian sexuality nor actively participates in reform politics. "Diotima" has ambitious, perhaps utopian, conceptual and political plans, with priorities and agendas that resist the changing fashions of fashionable discourse. Their experiences in women's groups, in the movement, and above all their work in collectives, which they deliberately reproduce, after years of silence, at a historical moment that celebrates rampant individualism, the poverty of feminism, and the counter-revolution to the woman's cause—the unsurpassed feminist experience of solidarity of the seventies which they attempt to reproduce, in the eighties, against historical odds, provides them with conceptual incisiveness and moral strength that is not easily bullied into facile solutions or directions. Adriana Cavarero's prose, as apparent from her "Per una teoria della differenza sessuale," is, in spite of its complex theoretical agenda and its indebtedness to French "*parler theorie*," a rare example of serious

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feminist writing in the eighties in the West.<sup>11</sup> Her style is clear, she is non-pretentious, and unencumbered by the apoliticality of her time. While many of her contemporaries, men and women alike, mumble something of the events or the effects of the "Red Brigades" in order to legitimate their abandoning of the marketplace; their reshuffling of antiquated notions of memories and the past, and their early retirement to the privacies of privilege, Cavarero's work in particular and the "Diotima" project in general, pursue a courageous if, perhaps, unpopular vision of collectivity and sociality.

So in spite of the rigorous philosophical and conceptual frame inactivated by the responses to the question of how a woman can become a subject, which would suggest primarily an ontological program, there is, then, an equally rigorous ethical, and thus ultimately political, program. In a sense, the work of "Diotima" doubles the work of the Women's Bookstore Collective. Whereas the latter presents itself expressly in a simple historical narrative while revealing a complex conceptual framework, the former presents itself in complex conceptual narrative while revealing a simple political framework. In both the theory and the practice of the Women's Bookstore Collective and "Diotima," woman becomes a subject by being with other women in a specific way, according to the rules of a specific feminine-made ethicality. That ethicality has a name: it is called the practice of the "*affidamento*," the practice of one woman entrusting herself to another woman, a woman different in status and value, one that commands a surplus in authority and power, in knowledge and experience, a surplus which she symbolically transfers to the less authoritative and less powerful woman, thereby mediating between the outside (male symbolic) world and the woman. It is this mediation between the symbolic mother and the daughter that woman can become who she has always potentially been but never was: a free, authentic subject. For us, on this side of the ocean, "Diotima's" practical suggestion as to how to be with women, as to how to become a subject on the basis of the practice of the "*affidamento*," where one woman acknowledges the "more" or the "surplus" in another woman, where, paradoxically, hierarchy produces equality by effacing equality in the first place, might appear somewhat problematical, and so might "Diotima's" theoretical proposition, that woman can become a subject of her own. We do live, after all, at a moment in which the unity and identity of the subject are rigorously called into question by psycholin-

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guistically inspired orientations, and in which the contests between Freud and Lacan, even between the early Lacan and the later Lacan, when it comes to the powers and the limits of the operations of the unconscious, have not been satisfactorily resolved.<sup>12</sup> There is much to be said for both a rigorous critique of "Diotima's" politics of the subject on the one hand, and its subject of politics on the other.<sup>13</sup> I will engage in neither here: not because I do not want to address the hierarchical structure, which, inexorably lurking from the theoretical construction of the "*affidamento*," is probably not universally applicable, but perhaps and rather more applicable in some social spheres than in others, in social situations in which there is something of a natural mother/daughter relation to begin with.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, and conversely, and even in situations that lend themselves naturally to mother/daughter relations among women, such as in educational structures, the practice of the "*affidamento*," depending in large part on the originary mother/daughter relation, is perhaps not much of a need or desire for those women whose originary relation with the mother was mostly one of equity rather than hierarchy, of friendship, of solidarity, and community rather than of authority and submission, one of sisterhood, acceptance, tolerance, and immense joy of being, of laughing, of celebrating rather than one of tension, ambiguities, possessiveness, intolerance, and envy. If I do not want to address the problematic nature of the practice of sexual difference or the "*affidamento*" here then it is not due to a lack of critical desire. Rather, I find it more interesting to present the position of "Diotima" to a community which could profit from the way in which it addresses the notion of differential power. I would welcome a discussion of power relations among women which would not displace the issue by pitting theoretical systems against each other, by deploying differences in critical preference as the grounds on which to discuss unequal relations. The structure of our life-world as women does not exhaust itself in theory, and mature theorists welcome and depend, on the coexistence of divergent theories. What we could do with today is not the displacement of the issue of power relations and their effects in the realm of theory, but rather an open discussion of the ways in which unequal relations of power among women do, as we here in the U.S. experience an immense poverty of feminism, effect the lives of many women sometimes in ways that cynically deride the basic forms of feminist solidarity. "Diotima" can help us to raise some questions in order to get this long overdue debate going.

## Notes

1. For initial readings of "Diotima" see Franca Bimbi, Laura Grasso, Maria Zancan, Gruppo di filosofia Diotima, *Il Filo di Arianna. Letture della differenza sessuale* (Rome: Cooperativa Utopia, 1987). Adriana Cavarero, Cristiana Fischer, Elvia Franco, Giannina Longobardi, Veronica Mariaux, Luisa Muraro, Anna Maria Piussi, Wanda Tommasi, Anita Sanvitto, Betty Zamarchi, Chiara Zamboni, Gloria Zanardo, *Diotima. Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987).

2. There are many excellent histories of Italian feminism in Italian. For an initial bibliography and an introduction to Italian feminism, see Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Liberazione della donna. Feminism in Italy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 1984), as well as Renate Holub, "Towards a New Rationality: Notes on Feminism and Current Discursive Practices in Italy," *Discourse* 4 (1981-82) 89-107. In addition, I recommend Judith A. Hellman, *Journeys among Italian Women: Feminism in Five Italian Cities* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1987). For a more recent account of some of the problematics in Italian feminist theory as they pertain to heterosexuality and lesbianism see Teresa de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain," *Differences* 1 (1989) 3-38. For recent feminist theory in Italy see Renate Holub, "For the Record: The Non-Language of Italian Feminist Philosophy," *Romance Languages Annual* 1 (1990) 133-40. Furthermore, several journals have dedicated an issue to matters related to Italian feminism. See "Women's Voices," *Italica* 65 (1988) 4, 293-350, and *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989).

3. For the Italian debate on sexual violence see Elisabetta Addis, "Women's Liberation and the Law on Sexual Violence: The Italian Feminist Debate," in *Socialist Review* vol. 19, (Oct.-Dec. 1989) 4: 106-27. The political history of Italian feminism is recorded by Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Liberazione della donna. Feminism in Italy* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1986).

4. I have addressed this question in the context of Italian Studies in the U.S. in a recent article, mentioned above, "For the Record: The Non-Language of Italian Feminist Philosophy," *Romance Languages Annual* 1 (1990): 133-40.

5. One of the leaders of both the Women's Bookstore in Milan and of "Diotima" is Luisa Muraro, who has practically translated all of Irigaray's works into Italian. Yet Muraro is not only a busy cultural importeur. She is the author of a wonderful and pioneering study in feminist medieval scholarship, of *Guglielma e Maifreda. Storia di una eresia femminista* (Milan: Tartaruga, 1985), reviewed in this issue of *Differentia*.

6. This publication has recently appeared in English under the title of *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990). The Italian text was published by Rosenberg & Sellier, Turin, 1987. It will be reviewed in *Differentia* 6.

7. See Renate Holub, "For the Record: The Non-Language of Italian Feminist Philosophy," *Romance Language Annual* 1 (1990) 133-40.

8. See Franca Bimbi, Laura Grasso, Maria Zancan, Gruppo di filosofia Diotima. *Il Filo di Arianna. Letture della differenza sessuale* (Rome: Cooperativa Utopia, 1987), pp. 71-129.

9. See Teresa de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U. S., and Britain," *Differences* 1 (1989) 3-38, as well as her introduction to *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, op. cit., pp. 1-21, in particular her response to Luisa Muraro's letter, p. 18.

10. See Elisabetta Addis, "Women's Liberation and the Law on Sexual Violence: The Italian Feminist Debate," *Socialist Review* 19 (1989) 4: 114-5.

11. Adriana Cavarero, "Per una teoria della differenza sessuale," in Adriana Cavarero, Cristiana Fischer, Elvia Franco, Giannina Longobardi, Veronica Mariaux, Luisa Muraro, Anna Maria Piusi, Wanda Tommasi, Anita Sanvitto, Betty Zamarchi, Chiara Zamboni, Gloria Zanardo. *Diotima: Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987), pp. 43-77.

12. I am referring to the many debates in feminist circles which focus on the structure of the unconscious as the condition for feminine freedoms, or as its limits. See, in particular, the work of Jacqueline Rose and Juliett Mitchell, *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (New York: Norton and Pantheon, 1985), who re-evaluate Lacan's early notion of the structure of the unconscious for a feminist agenda. Toril Moi, in her *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London and New York: 1985) states the various positions on this issue as they emerge from Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. See also the outstanding essay by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality," in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds., *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (New York: Basic Blackwell, 1989), pp. 81-101; and Teresa Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 89-139, with contributions by Rosi Braidotti, Margaret Whitford, and Luce Irigaray. See also Renate Holub "Between Plato and Quantum Theory: The Geometrics of Lacan's Quadrilateral Radicalism." Reviewing Shoshana Felman's *Jacques Lacan and The Adventure of Insight*, Jane Gallop's *Reading Lacan*, Juliett Flower MacCannell's "Figuring Lacan," and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's "Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis," in *Textual Practise* (1991).

13. A beautiful critique of "Diotima's" concept of subject and subjectivity has been proposed by Rosi Braidotti in *La ricerca delle donne*, eds. Maria Cristina Marcuzzo and Anna Rossi-Doria (Turin: Rosenberg & Seller, 1987), pp. 188-203.

14. I am thinking, for instance, of schools and educational institutions, where a conscious mentoring of women students by women teachers is not an unwelcome and for that matter unusual practice. Indeed, many of the members of the "Diotima" collective work in education.