



PhD in Philosophy Taught in English  
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**Theater of Thought:  
Intersection Between Philosophy, Theater and Performative Arts  
Practice**

**Academic abstract**

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## 1. Introduction

The current inquiry investigates the relationship between theater, philosophy and performing arts and focuses on feminist practices in Italy from the late 1960s to the 1990s. It identifies the roots of these practices in a possible relationship between philosophy, theater and performing arts. The research identifies the methodologies and the peculiarities of the "practices" introduced by feminists as a thinking-in-presence where the vocalization of thought is articulated as a practice of thinking-in-assembly. This reconstruction makes it possible to implement different genealogies in the history of thought and of theater. From a philosophical point of view, the research focuses on the theme of the relationship between thinking and voice. It analyses the genealogy of acoustic aspects of thinking in philosophical discourse from the fundamental ontology of Martin Heidegger where thinking is seen as a listening of Being, to Emmanuel Levinas's critique of fundamental ontology and his redefining the primacy of ethics. Levinas' critical approach to Heidegger's fundamental ontology introduces the notion of relation as an indispensable feature of acousticity, a thinking in which the process of thought is based not on negation but on the difference implied by the relation to the Other. This genealogy of acoustic thinking in the philosophy of Levinas is fundamental for the emergence of voice. The inquiry continues with the introduction of the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero, in whose work Western metaphysics is qualified as a devocalisation of logos, and who proposes strategies to vocalize thinking by shifting the focus from a videocentric view to the uniqueness of the voice and the importance of embodiment, whereby vocalization implies a multiplicity of relationships. The inquiry shows that the transition from fundamental ontology to ethics suggests much more than simply a theoretical movement. It implies an experimental attitude to the philosophical field where thinking itself constitutes agency. It is less about merging life and philosophy on an existential plane of being than about disjunctions within language, discontinuities where vital relations take place in a sort of generative process of thinking. This relation of the voice to the process of thought-formation suggests that the question of the voice is not to be examined as the missing element of Western metaphysics alone, but that this same "absence" or "lack" is related to the unconscious. The continuous emphasis on the absence of voice can be read as an indication of repression. On the basis of these ideas the investigation pursues

the question of vocalization through an in-depth examination of feminist practices at the beginning of the 1970s.

The dissertation then focuses on the practices of collective thinking born out of the second-wave feminist movement in Italy. In order to contextualize the appearance of the voice, the analysis concentrates on two experiences: in 1970, the practice of *Autocoscienza* within feminist groups that spread around the world; and, in 1983, the foundation of the feminist philosophical collective *Diotima* at the University of Verona. When looking at these experiences for the research it becomes important to define the sense in which we speak of the performative aspects of philosophy, and how these are indicative of processes of vocalization. Both lines of inquiry connect philosophy to a live performance: a thinking that connects to the body and manifests itself in listening as a relation already inscribed in thinking. It is in this sense that the current project looks in more detail at the question of the symbolic order of the voice understood as self-transformative. In order to return to the question of vocalization in linguistic, epistemological and ontological terms, the fundamental issue is to understand the voice as an emergent instrument; that is, not something that operates substantially, but that forms itself and gives itself in this process of formation starting precisely from relation. Vocalization becomes a form of thinking intended as a transforming intelligence. Thus, the question of intersection here is not simply formal. The relations between psychoanalysis, philosophy, performance and theater are in fact read not only as critical operations, but reliant on the activation of real self-transformative practices.

## 2. Research questions

2.1 How can we qualify the relation between philosophy and theater?

2.2 How can the discipline of theater itself be reconfigured as a practice of thought? What are the characteristics of a theater understood as a practice of thought?

2.3 What are the characteristics of thinking-in-assembly? How can thinking be seen as a practice of vocalization?

2.4 What is the relation between thinking and voice?

2.5 How is thinking as an acoustic phenomenon present in Western metaphysics?

2.6 What are the influences of Italian feminism on the articulation of thought as a practice of vocalization of the logos?

2.7 What is the relationship between theater and performing arts and the feminist practices of 1960-1990 in Italy?

2.8 How might the theater canon be re-imagined on the basis of theater as thinking-in-assembly? Is it possible to have an idea of research and experimental theater which is not identified with representation, but which remains open to the public in forms of thinking-in-assembly and social change?

- Can we read the *Self-portrait* of Carla Lonzi as a theater play? What are the characteristics of such an understanding of theater?
- Is it possible to have a new genealogy of experimental theater that starts from the figure of Carla Lonzi?

### 3. Summary of the discussion in the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part is titled *Acoustic Thought: from representation to voice*. This first part is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is titled *Thinking and Theater: Variations of Theater Ontology*.

#### 3.1 *Thinking and Theater: Variations of Theater Ontology*

The chapter's philosophical investigation of theater ontology raises the question of the relationship between the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis* associated with theatrical

representation and provides a critical approach to the relation between representation and form. For Aristotle, as is well known, theater practice, both as writing and as *mise-en-scène*, is part of poetic practice. Mimesis appears as innate and is part of the process of acquiring knowledge, extending truth into verisimilitude where we should not necessarily find an ontological distinction. It would not be an exaggeration if we called mimesis in Aristotle a function of language, one related to learning through transformation. If we think concretely, imitation is a type of logical operation which takes language beyond the operations of deduction and induction. This thinking is clearly related to pleasure and to feelings, but above all to the human ability to transform those feelings by establishing a relation to them and also enacting them, putting them in a context. It is a thinking in which truth belongs to the human capability for self-transformation and for enacting complex relations that often transcend classical logical categories. In this sense we can think of mimesis as a theatrical category of thinking through both collective experience and enactment, in which learning and self-transformation are very important not only individually but for the community. Thus, this notion of verisimilitude cannot be strictly linked to ontological defects. It is real if we think of it as a function of learning through enactment. As we can see, theater as a practice has somehow been present in philosophy from the beginning and perhaps a certain misunderstanding in our conception of theater could be observed starting with Plato, who assigned the theater to the ontological sphere of thinking as precisely a mechanism of deception of empirical reality. The famous allegory of the cave speaks of theater as a means of representation. It would be simplistic to read Aristotle's concept of mimesis as an ontological problem. The chapter proposes a notion of mimesis as the formation of language starting from experience, the possibility that a story can be told a second time, can be told again. Such an understanding of mimetic thought does not represent a reality, but testifies to a reality. We need another fundamental concept for tragedy that moves from singularity to chorality and from representation as the form of image making to rhythm. To think in theatrical terms does not mean to present something in a plausible way. The first chapter proposes the thin line between naturalism (reconstruction of the atomist idea of rhythms as relation that creates difference) and something radically new, which takes its spark from Heraclitus' philosophical style, and which reveals an acoustic realm of the formation of thought. As Heidegger's reading shows, the twentieth century's ontological centers underwent a complete conceptual reversal, and yet theater practice continues to remain attached to them, and to a certain conception of an event. The analysis of theater as a collective form of thinking brings the analysis to an acoustic ontology of the theatrical event.

3.2 The second chapter of the dissertation is titled *Thinking and Listening: Martin Heidegger*.

In the next chapters (2-3-4) the focus of the analysis is on the emergence of the acoustic dimension of thinking within the clashes of twentieth-century Western metaphysics. I begin the inquiry with Heidegger's philosophy where thinking is defined as listening to Being. The second phase of Heidegger's work, dedicated to the history of Being, pays particular attention to the question of language, poetry and the work of art. And it is only within the realm of language and art that we see the explicit use of acoustics, where thinking is described in terms of listening to being. For Heidegger truth in art doesn't reside in a correct representation. Thinking is the relation of Being to man, not the other way around. It is not a product, a consequence, a cause. It is an offering which consists in the fact that in thinking Being comes to language, language is the house of Being, in it man dwells. Heidegger's style is characterized by poetic etymologies, the invention of a philosophical use of language including that same term *Da-sein* (being-there), which relocates semantically the root of the word which means "to be" to indicate the temporal horizon for the intelligibility of Being-in-general. In these philosophical inventions (*Stimmung, interval, language as the house of being*) we can discern the first feature of acousticity as primarily the poetic act of a philosophical lexicon, one that resounds in multiple acts of understanding. It is not simply in pronouncing those new concepts that meaning is formed; rather, thinking itself is invited to dwell in the acoustic.

The second aspect of the analysis concentrates on the idea of action and the notion of responsibility within fundamental ontology. In this phase the investigation undertakes a close reading of the *Letter on Humanism* of Heidegger<sup>1</sup>, a response to *Existentialism Is a Humanism*<sup>2</sup>, a text based on a public lecture given by Jean-Paul Sartre in Paris on 29 October 1945. Unlike Heidegger, thinking for Sartre still occurs in the realm of reflexive subjectivity. The question of how to restore the meaning of "humanism" brings these philosophers to two radically different ways of understanding action. Heidegger looks at the question of action within the realm of fundamental ontology, redefining the very notion of thinking. Human action can be ascribed only to the sphere of listening. Listening is fundamental to capture the

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Letter on Humanism* in *Basic Writings*, San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1977

<sup>2</sup> Sartre J-P., *Existentialism in Humanism*, in *Continental Philosophy Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996



nature of thinking as action, because thinking is always a relation which connects humans to the essence of Being. A philosophical language close to acoustics is much more appropriate to speak of this idea of action than a language which evokes causes and responsibilities. The primary responsibility is to listen to the resonance of Being, and to safeguard its home against all the reductions which want to assimilate thinking to the mere resources or potentials for action. Thinking as a clearing of Being, envisioned by Heidegger in this last period, is an acoustic phenomenon. When thoughts fall silent Being returns as a resonance

3.3 The third chapter of the dissertation is titled *Thinking and Other: Emmanuel Levinas*. At the core of thinking, according to Levinas, lies the irreducible encounter with the Other and the human face that cannot be totalized into one's self. Levinas' critical approach to Heidegger's fundamental ontology introduces the notion of relation as an indispensable feature of acousticity, a thinking in which the process of thought is based not on negation but on the difference implied by the relation to the Other. Thinking implies a relation that takes exteriority as a primary consideration: a place able to welcome the encounter with the Other, where individuals are not reduced to derivatives of totality, and where unicity is not sacrificed to objective meaning. In order to overcome totality, Levinas introduces infinity as an eschatological notion outside of history, in which the very notion of time is displaced and located beyond historically or ontologically circular temporality. In the essay "Is Ontology Fundamental?,"<sup>3</sup> Levinas states that both Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, with its discovery of the intentionality of consciousness, and Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein as "being thrown" into the world contribute to the same understanding: in order to understand being as such we need always to link it to our existence in this world. Thus it is not simply a theoretical attitude but concerns the whole of human behavior. The totalization of thinking resides in the fact that all knowledge is composed of relations between different beings, and this implies an understanding that these beings and relations exist. Another turning point that prepares the ground for the voice to appear is the notion of uniqueness. Levinas draws attention to the formal alterity according to which "an individual is other to the other". There is a more fundamental logical principle than identity and that principle is uniqueness. Each individual for Levinas is unique. Each individual is also part of a whole, but its uniqueness is irreducible. In the strictly formal order, a human being belongs to the human genus, yet each individual as an individual is "other" to the other. And at this point he

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<sup>3</sup> Levinas, Emanuel. *Is Ontology Fundamental?* in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998

proposes a radically different understanding of thinking: a thinking which is based on ethics. It is thinking as responsibility for the Other, silencing the identity of the Same. Response is the first language, according to Levinas, and our responsibility consists in being “for-the-other.” In his analysis of interpersonal relations where we need “to not forget” irreducible otherness, to be aware of the presence of a third (which is very different from universal objectified relations), Levinas provides an intersection of the ethical and the political which he explains in terms of the “third party.” The “third party” is 1) different from the Other; 2) also present in the Other; 3) and this third person – “he,” “she,” “they” – is also the other of the Other. This is where Levinas’ ethics makes its final transition, introducing space instead of time as the condition of an authentic process of thinking. The irreducible encounter with the other is necessarily plural. Levinas affirms the personal responsibility of preserving the awareness of the irreducibility of the encounter with the Other; at the same time, he introduces a third party that has been forgotten or ignored, and takes great care that the account of this relation avoids universalization.

### 3.4 Thinking and Voice: Adriana Cavarero

The question of uniqueness will become a fundamental term in Adriana Cavarero’s *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. As she writes, the theme of uniqueness is decisive in what she perceives as the attack on Western metaphysics by Levinas and Arendt. Nevertheless, for Cavarero, their philosophical thinking remains oblivious to the voice. Language and thinking, even if placed in a spatial relation as acousticity, are still bound to the visual. She explains that the place of speech in Levinas is different from the place of interlocutors and that difference “has the status of transcendence.” The “being in front of” is defined by Levinas as the face of the other—an expression that designates the irreducible uniqueness of every human being as a face that regards me, indeed as the “face of the one who regards *me* par excellence.” This horizon is therefore visual.<sup>4</sup>

In the fourth chapter of the dissertation titled *Thinking and Voice: Adriana Cavarero* the analysis looks in detail at the notion of acoustic thought from the perspective of a lack of the voice. The history of metaphysics should in fact finally be told as the strange history of the devocalization of logos, according to Cavarero. The exclusion of the voice has been central to the history of logic. That exclusion played an important role in the definition of truth in videocentric terms. Voice appears from the very beginning as a term associated with

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<sup>4</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 27.

the animal and non-rational aspects of life. She observes that in the classical era, *phone*, the Greek word for voice, applies not only to animal and human but also to other sounds. And all these sonic phenomena were distinct from speech. The oscillation between discourse (language) and reason (thinking) in a way assigns to language the qualification of being primarily a semantic organization where voice is excluded. As Cavarero notes, this relates directly to Aristotle, who, in the *Poetics*, speaks of logos as “*phone semantike*” (signifying voice) and the understanding of language as a system of signification. Of primary importance, as Cavarero astutely observes, is the interaction of that construction with another fundamental definition of Western philosophy provided by Aristotle, one that differentiates the human from other living beings on the basis of language. This brings us to the consequence that the rationality of man is deeply connected to his signifying voice. But it is exactly the “signifying” that marks his difference and separates man from the other animals, their voices are only a *semeion*, a sign of pleasure or pain. Thinking is now related to language understood as a system of signification. It is in this realm of speech, understood as the articulation of meaningful predicates, that the voice appears for the first time as separated from corporeality. But this second step, as Cavarero notices, contains traces of Platonism. And, as a result, it is not simply a restrictive mechanism but has specific hierarchical connotations within the realm of epistemology that complicate the picture further. One such trace is the notion of thinking as a dialogue of the soul, in which the voice is denuded of sound and becomes a silent word in the mental sphere. When Plato refers to the soul, Cavarero says, he refers to those parts of the soul associated with the intellect. The soul is the place where mental activity (*noein* and *dianoein*) takes place. For many, the dialogical form of Platonic writing is the sign of a dynamic understanding of knowledge, one that proceeds in a hermeneutical procedure, composing itself in its very performance. But, for Cavarero, what Plato and Platonism ultimately suggest is that something counterintuitive is at work. We need to take into account the fact that devocalization takes place in the act of vocalization, of utterance. It is by assigning to the voice a mere function of utterance that it becomes basically philosophically insignificant; the real place of signification is voiceless. A further aspect is underlined by Cavarero, a deeper cultural stratum that she qualifies as the subordination of the voice to signification, which corresponds to the subordination of the vocal to the visual. When analyzing the subordination of the vocal, Cavarero asks if there is any truth beyond the apophantic; or better, if there is a vocal apophansis, one based on uniqueness, which in some way does not reduce to identity but instead opens to the plurality of voices.

At this point of the dissertation the inquiry traces a passage in which thought is listened to and seeks also to refine the question of “who” is being listened to. Cavarero considers the devocalization of logos as a loss, not strictly in terms of the dichotomy of the oral and the written, but because it basically excludes what is unique in us. It is the cancellation of what is unique in communication. In the communication of the phone semantike we communicate our uniqueness in the form of the foundation of all that is communicable. In that universalization, there is the loss of the corporeal, and Cavarero proposes a vocal ontology of uniqueness in which it is not attention to the vocalization of thinking that we need to restore. A clear new path opens before philosophy understood not only as vocal expression but also as a presence of the corporeal and the political. And the dissertation proposes one possible course, which connects philosophy with theater and performance.

### 3.5 Thinking-in-assembly. Theater’s methodologies in the Italian feminist movement, 1970-1990: The formation of groups

Thus, the dissertation in the second part titled *Thinking-in-assembly. Theater’s methodologies in the Italian feminist movement, 1970-1990* looks at the practices of collective thought born out of the second-wave feminist movement in Italy. The sixth chapter begins by describing the phenomenon of the formation of groups of women at the end of the 1960s and in the beginning of the 1970s and the conditions under which those forms of collectivity started to form and to spread in Italy. There are many different examples of groups, but in order to talk about how thinking takes on the aspect of a shared experience, the analysis focuses in particular on the practices that have characterized Italian feminism in the period 1966-1983. It is well known that the first document of Italian feminism is called *Manifesto programmatico del gruppo DEMAU*. DEMAU was an abbreviation of ‘demystifying patriarchal authoritarianism’ and bears the date December 1, 1966. Other texts followed in which the term “the female question” gained more conjunctions and which denounced the condition of being a woman in a society where practically nothing from the world of women was represented. The groups’ awareness that they needed to confront this latter absence was accompanied by a severe criticism of any form of inscription in the existing order. It was a strong and clear stand against mere equality and also against the possibility of women acting in society without assuming the position of an autonomous

subject of analysis. It was not enough to denounce forms of oppression; women must become an autonomous subject of analysis. The policy of integrating women into society was thus deemed “the chamomile of true evil.” In this sense, it must be emphasized that the separation of women from society was also programmatically assumed, not implemented, and separatism (i.e. places and groups from which men were excluded) became a dramaturgical strategy meant to clearly declare that it was a question of a political laboratory of autonomy, and that the time had come for women to take responsibility for their own condition.

Another group of considerable importance, Women’s Revolt (*Rivolta Femminile*), was founded in Milan. In 1970 they published *The Manifesto of Female Revolt (Manifesto di rivolta femminile)*. Carla Lonzi, an already well-known art critic, was a member, and decided to withdraw from her role as art critic in 1969 by publishing a final work *Self-Portrait (Autoritratto)*, a collection of recordings of conversations with various artists. According to Women’s Revolt, “equality is a legal principle: the common denominator present in every human being to whom justice must be done. Difference is an essential principle that concerns the ways of the human being, the peculiarities of experiences, purposes, openings, the sense of existence in a given situation, and it is in the situation that she wants to give herself. Between woman and man lies the basic human difference.”

In groups women met, talked, had experiences together. Spending time together, as a moment of political awareness, was completely new to women whose sole recognized and culturally delineated space was the private dimension. Yet these private experiences had a political value. For women it meant recognizing a space of autonomy in women's lives, but also recognizing the political value of autonomy in relations between women. Using the recognition of the relations between women to create a mediation between women and the world was a way to start experimenting with ways linked to a reconsideration of an autonomous female sphere. This type of autonomy then took the form of a question about the way in which the relations between women and time are represented in forms of male transcendence. Feminine temporality, linked to the cycle of life, was not recognized as an autonomous sphere. It was actually read as immanence, as a cure for children and family, as reproduction. Precisely by leveraging the temporality of the relation and autonomy, women recover a female transcendence that is not part of the cycle of production, but instead becomes a battleground for symbolic autonomy. In this way, both philosophy and psychoanalysis become central to the recovery of a project of feminine transcendence.

### 3.6 The practice of autocoscienza (self-awareness)

Feminism in Italy, also known as the feminism of difference, recognized the central role of self-awareness practices. The practice of self-awareness began to spread at the beginning of the 1970s thanks to Women's Revolt. In contrast to other contexts, in Italy we observe a rooting of theory in *practices*. There is no extensive literature documenting these *practices*, but in 1977 a collective volume of writings, *Do Not Believe You Have Rights*<sup>5</sup>, was published under the collective authorship of the Women's Bookstore of Milan. This volume remains a reference point testifying to what was transmitted exclusively through experience. The practice of self-awareness or "autocoscienza," which literally means self-consciousness, or the raising of consciousness, was already practiced in the United States. Its advent in Italy had an extraordinary diffusion. It was simple to organize, all you needed was the political awareness that relations between women were the basis from which to start, and a willingness to share oneself, to do a job, to take responsibility for one's own condition. It was possible to think that all of one's anger, repression, loneliness was something personal, due to this or that individual's particular character, to personal failure. But by being in a group, finding the courage to start talking, members discovered that it was a widespread cultural condition. Concerning the lack of representation, the very act of talking about what it means to be a woman in daily life was a step, an exercise, a rehearsal.

The practices of self-awareness consisted in practicing listening and working on disidentification, but also on one subject identifying with another, on transfers, on the experience of making language, finding the words to relate oneself to another woman. This intimacy of course had its own difficulties. But at the same time it contained such a liberating power that it was able to bring together stories that otherwise would have remained enclosed in a private space. Since it was not really personal stories, but a widespread culture of repression that was internalized, one had to find the courage to admit that if one did not take a stand, if one did not act against this oppression, one would remain complicit. These self-awareness workshops had self-transformation as their central aim, their starting point being the acknowledgment of discomfort in relation to the surrounding culture; instead of putting the subject in the position of a victim, they promoted the assumption of a first-person

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<sup>5</sup> Libreria delle Donne di Milano, *Non credere di avere dei diritti, La generazione della libertà femminile nell'idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne*, Torino: Libreria delle donne di Milano, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1987.

narrative that would enable a woman to become aware of the part she plays in her own condition. The self-awareness groups declared themselves to be groups of political practices. Talking about oneself was not simply speaking, but above all a way of integrating the unexplored narratives, stories and voices that escaped the speaker. Talking in a group meant taking responsibility for what you are in that moment and how you feel about it. In some ways the situation resembled a theatrical improvisation, or a psychoanalytic session, but not at the moment when you were on stage with an audience, or with a psychoanalyst; rather, the moments before, when you were preparing. The aspect of preparation was as important as the act of speaking. What I mean is that the practices of self-awareness, in addition to their obvious reference to psychoanalysis, were also clearly linked, without perhaps relying on the model, to theater and performance techniques. After all, there was also the pleasure, the exercise, the excitement of a creative type of experience, of a transformation. In my opinion, the question of pleasure is fundamental along with the recovery of a public sphere of thought in which processuality is recognized as an integral part of the very quality of thought. In the group exercise of thinking, of telling the truth, in the Foucauldian sense<sup>6</sup>, or in assuming the risk of what one says, the political dimension does not lie simply in the fact that it is a collective exercise, but in the connection between bodies and desires, which are capable of freeing energies which subsequently become acting principles. A truth, so to speak, through contagion.

### 3.7 The role of the performative within the women's political movement.

The chapter concludes with the analysis of the role of the performative. The term “performative” rose to prominence thanks to J. L. Austin's theories of performative utterances. For Foucault, the act of telling the truth (the ontology of vocalization, in Cavarero's terms) could never be a performative statement since the latter always occurs within a codified situation, whereas the act of telling the truth in reality always involves a change in a situation. Self-awareness groups did not treat the issue of the performative as an integral part, perhaps because of its negative associations with inscription in discourse; however, they were guided by the awareness that discourse is a patriarchal domain that in itself reproduces the systems of oppression that it seeks to denounce. Judith Butler's ideas of performativity<sup>7</sup> offer another alternative. One way in which she uses the term simply involves

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<sup>6</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Управляването на себе си и другите* I том (1982-1883) и *Смелостта за истината*, II том (1983-1984) прев. Антоанета Колева, ИК Критика и Хуманизъм, 2016 и 2021, София.

<sup>7</sup> Butler Judith. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. London: Harvard University Press, 2015.

what we generally understand by acting. We act, play with identity. Each name is an identity produced by language, that is, by the discursive order that structures both the symbolic and the social. But we shouldn't assume that there is something to be performed. There is no such thing as the biological bodily material evidence to be performed in the realm of the symbolic; on the contrary, the assumption of such an identity is given to us by performance. Butler addresses an ontological question within the notion of the performative. What she is saying is that there is an element of the performative that enters the ontological. Indeed, feminist groups in Italy can be read within such a framework of experimenting with what it means to vocalize this ontological oscillation. In that case performance becomes part of collective processes of self-transformation and, in a completely sequential way, philosophy rediscovers its roots in the experience of life, in the matrix of life that cannot be fully captured in discourse as distribution of power but which inhabits its oscillations. When the analysis emphasizes the character of the performative, it does so not really by addressing a specific form – even if, being in a group, our talk already has a formal aspect that leads us to think of a scene. Such a scene is not perceived as an aesthetic situation, although it has the character of a public space. Rather, the investigation focuses on this process of ontological oscillation (being and performing being) which grants a transformative aspect to the self in an assembly.

Thinking collectively does not simply mean that there are different subjects expressing their thoughts. Collective thinking is a psycho-physical process. It begins from an inner and rather individual impulse, but cannot be simply identified with this. Thought here must be conceived entirely in relation to listening to another “in the flesh.” As already mentioned, we do not have a discourse; the process is one of a search for words. This search is made up of gaps, silences, of everything that lies submerged in the body in repressed experiences, emotions. All this begins to be a part of thinking. Thought does not exclude these spheres, nor does it order them, or impose a hierarchy. In this process, you have to make the tools you need; you do not use tools that are already available. The performative aspect of thinking proposed by this dissertation has a connection with philosophy, it relates to the transformative aspect that appears when philosophy is linked to experience and to first-person narrative. The performative aspect of thinking emerges when the voice operates as a link between different spheres in the formation of the self. The performative aspect of philosophy does not lie in performing in front of an audience, or in our being a thinking subject, or in speaking out loud, or in drawing out the formation of thoughts that I am voicing – this is a very narrow spectacularization of theoretical labor. The performative rather occurs



when I am listening, and in my recognition that in the process of listening a transformative process takes place within me. In the practice of self-awareness in early feminist practice the investigation recognizes the link between thinking and performance, and the transformational capacity that is rooted in the voice. And from all this effort another way of thinking about philosophy emerges, and, even more importantly, another way of practicing it.

### 3.8 Diotima: philosophy practice-in-presence

The seventh chapter of the dissertation is titled *Diotima: The Vocabulary of the Voice and Thinking-in-presence*. One of the ways to address the collective dimension of thinking concerns the creation of spaces. In the 1970s, the idea of creating places where women could meet and where relations between women would be on the agenda began to emerge. This is how the phenomenon of Women's Bookstores was born as a place for politics, debate, education. The first one was founded in Milan in 1975 by a collective of women including Luisa Muraro and Lia Cigarini, who are still very active in the place. The creation of such places marks a particular moment in the practice of groups, *the practice of doing*. In a way, the choice of the bookstore was a choice of "doing things with words," but at the same time it strove to disseminate knowledge: it was both a shelter and a market. In 1980, this creation of spaces extended into the University of Verona. *Diotima*, a women's philosophical community, was founded in the University of Verona in 1984 by Luisa Muraro. The chapter analyzes in detail the methodologies used by the collective to practice philosophy now in an academic setting. In her work *Thinking in Presence: Conversations, Places, Improvisations*<sup>8</sup> Chiara Zamboni underlines the relation between philosophy and performance in "acting *Diotima*." What emerges from this text is the practice of thinking in a community, understood as a desire for politics. This involves the conscious creation of a laboratory of the word, as well as fatigue with the word and the responsibility that one assumes in front of this symbolic laboratory. Of central importance is the experience and the practice of difference, along with an overwhelming attention to the literature and poetry and theology produced by other women past and present. Recovering a sphere of authority entailed recognizing authority in the other. The chapter extends to analysis of publications by *Diotima* and concludes that the question of voice in philosophy is not separable from that experience.

It is important to note that the question of the voice as it appears in the work of Adriana Cavarero is not a turning point but a continuation of the experience of *Diotima* in

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<sup>8</sup> Zamboni Chiara, *Pensare in presenza. Conversazioni, luoghi, improvvisazioni*, Napoli: Liguori Editore, 2009

which Cavarero took part. Adriana Cavarero's *For More than One Voice* was written in the early 1990s, after her separation from the *Diotima* collective. Yet, for ten years, Cavarero had been a part of it, and this community, whether she admitted it or not, had an influence on her thinking. The voice is not a concept which endeavors to provide another foundation for metaphysics but a practice. The result of my inquiry shows that the voice enters on the philosophical stage through *practice*. It is not theory that opens the space for a new practice. It is exactly the other way around. The voice appears in the background of the intersection of philosophy and performance that took place between 1969-1990. In a way, we can conceive of the experience of *Diotima* in terms of a vocalization of the logos, the restitution of the body to thought, and the primacy of relation and experience as constitutive of the act of thinking. Different ways of understanding philosophy are implemented. Philosophy as re-narration, philosophy as restitution of a feminine transcendence, philosophy as rediscovery of writing in a healing process. The themes vary, but the practice of relations among women remains fundamental. In this way, doing philosophy is taken literally: it is a doing that starts from listening, but also a practice of entrusting. The practice of entrusting has specific aspects in feminism and is linked to the identification of a female figure to whom authority is conferred. It is the exercise of measuring a relation, shifting listening to an interpersonal level.

### 3.9 Carla Lonzi: theater methodology as radical hermeneutic

In the few final chapters of the dissertation, the analysis returns to theater through the work of one of the protagonists and founders of the Italian feminism, the art critic and historian Carla Lonzi (founder of Women's Revolt /Rivolta Femminile), showing that theater was actually extremely important for feminism. Lonzi and her colleagues saw in theater a chance of telling the truth; however, this theater was removed from the stage, although continuing to challenge its instruments and reinvent its relation to participation. The audience is thus not only *not* excluded; it becomes an important tool for the spread of feminism and, as contemporary history shows us, it is destined to grow in what Adriana Cavarero calls, following Hanna Arendt, a surging democracy<sup>9</sup>. The inquiry shows that even when theatrical

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<sup>9</sup> Cavarero, Adriana. *Surging Democracy: Notes on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought*, trans. Matthew Gervase (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021)

representation hasn't been explicitly the object of her investigations, in her moments of intellectual invention and research Lonzi often turned to theater<sup>10</sup>. But in speaking of theater now from our perspective we are clearly deviating from the idea of *mise-en-scène*. The analysis shows that theater can be constructively addressed as a device, a methodology, an instrument and after the experience of feminism, theater is rather a reservoir of lived experience. The dissertation in that manner provides a critical approach to the philosophical dichotomies inherited by theater and provides an opening for a new feminist perspective on the problem of representation within the theater canon.

### 3. Evidence and methods

The method of the investigation relates thinkers to their contexts. The research methodology can be qualified as hermeneutics that works on the contextualisation of the research material and the sources. Thinking through the reading of texts is one of the ways this inquiry is conducted. There is evidence that the thoughts we think have already been thought and their return in the present requires further inquiry. Such a question is the rise of the feminist movements in recent years. The intellectual labor undertaken during the dissertation is an attempt of thinking that sees in the past the seeds of a future, which, today, perhaps only for a moment, appears to us. In this method the dissertation is presented as a chorus. At some point, one discovers that present efforts began long ago, in the distant past, and all that we can bequeath is the grace of a patience that allows us to remain faithful to the things we consider important even if they seem to belong to either past or future time.

The methodology included:

- Reading and collecting material (first and original editions).
- Translation and commentary from original documents.
- Conducting interviews with Diotima Collective (Chiara Zamboni in University of Verona).

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<sup>10</sup> Lonzi, Carla. *Armande, sono io*. Milano: Scritti di rivolta femminile, 1992

- Visiting and meeting with the founders of the Women's Bookstore in Milan, Luisa Muraro and Lia Cigarini.
- Working in the archives of the Women's Bookstore.
- Encounter and interview with Angela de Carlo, the only member of Women's Revolt still alive.
- Meeting and conversation with Adriana Cavarero.
- Meeting and conversation with the director of the archive of Carla Lonzi, Annarosa Buttarelli.
- Meeting and conversation with Giovanna Zapperi, one of the main scholars of Carla Lonzi, currently teaching at the University in Zurich.

The methodology included work in the archive of the Women's Bookstore in Milan through which I introduced myself to Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, Chiara Zamboni. In this way, the writing and research that preceded the writing of the dissertation also had an important professional element, expanding my knowledge of Italian philosophy.

#### **4. Purpose of the inquiry**

The purpose of the dissertation was both to extend the boundaries of what we consider to be the history of theater, and to look at this history from the perspective of philosophy and feminism. This brought me to conceive of a new field that sees philosophical and performative pursuits as interconnected. And it is through these multilayered relationships of connection that both performance and philosophy extend their boundaries and introduce specific fields of experience. The philosophy of theater, which constituted the purpose of my dissertation, and to which my inquiry serves as an introduction, situates the crossing of disciplines that took place in the last century in both time and space. To intersect feminism and contemporary theater is one of the key results of the inquiry. The analysis shows how feminist practices have innovative elements which are rooted in the vocabulary of performance and theater, but looks also at other ways in which the feminist legacy can in retrospect change our understanding of theater. A key result of the dissertation is this cross-reading between disciplines, a central critical tool in my dissertation. It is used as a lens that enables one to see theater not simply as *mise-en-scène* but, first of all, as a methodology

of collective thinking practices. Along with this presentation of theater from the perspective of methodology, the intersection between theater and feminism looks on theater practice as a means to end oppression and begin the work of women's self-recognition and self-determination, and analyze how all possible intellectual tools were used by feminists to improve their own condition and that of other women. The core discovery of my investigation is that theater understood as collective thinking practice can extend that legacy.

## **5. Conclusion**

In recent years, we have witnessed a rewriting of the canon of accepted traditions from the perspective of absent voices. We still don't have a history of the theater in which women are called to be protagonists and this makes me think that if such a theater history is to be written, it is necessary to start from collective practice. Such a history can be seen as a rehearsal of autonomous thinking where language is remastered in a way that is closely linked to lived experience and the body and the voice and, before all else, to the practice of relationship. In this dissertation I consider the act of rewriting as itself part of the acoustic genealogy of thought. In this genealogy, we might recognize not only an attempt to introduce an alternative historiography, but a theoretical mobilization meant to revise the power structures in existing narratives. The rewriting of canons cannot and should not be identified solely with the analysis of ideologies. Yet isn't that exactly what we understand today as the task of criticism? Exposing the relations in representative functions, and to this extent an analysis of ideologies. But thinking is not merely unmasking ideologies, and we will not limit the voice to exposing ideologies. Not only should we not limit the voice to this task, neither should we limit ourselves to identifying the critical potential of an artistic practice. What this rewriting of the canon entails and whether it is even possible to think something anew is a question already posed within the philosophical tradition by Hannah Arendt. To some extent critical of a temporal linear frame for thinking and narrating, Arendt brings us to a different focal point of experience, one where thinking of the voice as vocalisation of logos forecloses the possibility of thinking something new. And thinking is precisely the possibility of the new, a kind of hope beyond the ruins of the present. I introduce some of the ideas of Hannah Arendt in connection to voice as a "gap" – a spatial term – between the past and the future, so as to think the present through the future (something she calls "diagonal thinking"), and also to introduce the hermeneutic condition that lifts thinking out of totalization. The dissertation

explores the possibility of re-writing (re-telling) the theater canon through Hannah Arendt's notion of tradition<sup>11</sup>, looking at tradition not simply as the preservation of meaning but as a new conception of thinking understood as a radical hermeneutics of voice. The turn away from the ontological analysis of theater and knowledge and the never-ending question of the real permit us instead to look at theater in terms of practices of thinking-in-assembly, by tracing the specific nature of a fundamental misunderstanding of the problem of reality and representation and its political significance.

Why is it not enough to conclude all this in the formula of conceptual performance, or conceptual theater, in terms of a critical analysis of the contemporary European scene in recent years and of my own experience in the field of performance? In the current situation, in which the stage changes from one moment to the next, dominated by economies of visibility,<sup>12</sup> the dissertation inquires into the role of theater in the future as a long-standing intersection of different practices. In this light, the relation between theater and philosophy is only one intersection among others. Theater as a practice of thinking-in-assembly involves the active redefinition of the contemporary artistic condition, a condition in which we observe a fruitful but implied transition from theatrical thinking as representation to theater thinking as ethics. A shift from the stage as representation to the stage as a collective practice, in which different fields are present, will allow us to register the acknowledgment of various forms of relation, instead of hierarchies, and to see the emergence and valorization of practices in the primacy of ethics.

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<sup>11</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future, Six Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: The Viking Press, 1961

<sup>12</sup> By "economies of visibility" I mean the process according to which a work of art, a theatrical or other performance, does not depend directly on the commercial market, but depends on a market organized around its visibility and circularity and other criteria according to which it receives funding from the state or from foundations whose purpose it is to finance art. Economies of visibility are the logic according to which an artist or artists are considered eligible to receive such funding or not. As usual, there are criteria that concern precisely visibility, the relationship with the public, strategies to ensure that the work has the greatest circulation possible. These criteria are considered neutral with respect to the market, because they do not have a direct relationship with gallery owners or collectors. This consideration of neutrality is certainly only presumed and involves a whole series of ambiguities with respect to the mechanisms of independence of the art scene and ways of interpreting its social and political value.

## **6. Contribution and innovation**

- The introduction of the term “theater of thought” to indicate the intersections between philosophy, theater and performing arts. The theorisation and the historical contextualisation of those intersections.
- The introduction of the term “acoustic thought” to indicate a possible genealogy in Western metaphysics (Heidegger, Levinas, Cavarero) based on vocalization of logos.
- The introduction of theater practice as practice of thinking-in-assembly. The reconstruction of the direct relation between the notion of vocalization of logos in philosophy with feminist practice in Italy 1960-1990.
- The introduction to the Bulgarian public of the work of the Italian feminist Carla Lonzi and the philosophical collective Diotima. This dissertation offers for the first time a reading of their work from the perspective of theater and performance practice.
- The recognition of the crucial role that theater practice played in the transition of the feminist movement from very intimate and private gathering among women to a mass movement. The re-reading of the theater canon from a feminist perspective.

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