

# Open Borders

## Introduction

*Silvia Benso and Antonio Calcagno*

Roberto Esposito opens his work *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Thought* by noting that there has been a great resurgence of interest in Italian philosophy. As he remarks,

After a long period of retreat (or at least of stalling), the times appear to be favorable again for Italian philosophy. The signs heralding this shift, in a way that suggests something more than mere coincidence, are many. I am not just referring to the international success of certain living authors, among the most translated and discussed writers in the world, from the United States to Latin America and Japan to Australia, leading to a resurgence of interest in Europe as well. There have been other cases of this sort in the past, but they have involved individuals instead of a horizon: a group that in spite of its diversity of issues and intentions somehow remains recognizable by its common tone. This is precisely what has been taking shape in recent years, however, with an intensity that recalls the still recent landing of “French theory” on the coasts and campuses of North America.<sup>1</sup>

Esposito pointedly draws a connection between Italian thought and its many interlocutors in North and South America, Asia, and Europe. As Remo Bodei remarks, the *forte* of Italian philosophy in the world today is that it

“responds to a widespread need for concreteness and reality (*realità*) after the finicky inquiries of the analytic philosophers and the (apparent) conceptual acrobatics of French Theory,” which has dominated continental philosophy in the last decades.<sup>2</sup> A peculiarity of Italian philosophy, according to Bodei, is that its interlocutors have never been a specialized audience (scholars, clerics, university students), but rather have been a wider public ultimately made of the majority of the human beings, the “non-philosophers,” as Benedetto Croce used to call them. Hence, the questions that Italian philosophy addresses are largely themes of broad concern to human beings in general, whose characteristics are those of being “not only rational animals but also desiring and projecting animals, whose thoughts, actions, and expectations escape predetermined argumentative rules or rigorously defined methods.”<sup>3</sup>

Mindful of the dialectical, dialogical nature of Italian philosophy as Bodei presents it—a dialectics that emerges from the discrepancy between thought and lived life—the present volume explores one important strand of the ongoing dialogue to which Esposito alludes, namely, the provocative, if not sometimes troubling, relationship between Italian philosophy and continental European thought. This relationship has existed ever since the beginning of what was not yet entirely identifiable either as Italian or as continental thinking. The aims of this collection, which explicitly addresses a relationship that is constitutive of Italian thought broadly understood, are threefold. First, we wish to show the intimate relationship between contemporary Italian philosophy and continental thinking, not only in terms of its more recent framework, as articulated by Esposito, but from late modernity to the present. We do this to highlight the depth and expanse of the dialogue that is taking place. Second, we focus on the philosophical fruits of this encounter of minds. Questions about the nature and scope of politics, life, being, women, literature, sociality, power, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and technology are taken up to expose new or underinvestigated aspects, which are both meaningful for and relevant to our rapidly changing world. Finally, we see the dialogue as a means for bringing to the fore figures of Italian thought who, though well known in the Italian and European contexts, may not be equally familiar to Anglophone readers. For example, and just to name a few, we consider Carla Lonzi, Luisa Muraro, Ugo Perone, Mario Perniola, and Vincenzo Vitiello. Regrettably and due to various editorial constraints, this foregrounding requires leaving in the background some figures and movements (such as Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno, and other thinkers in the workerist tradition, as well as theorists such as Laura Bazzicalupo, Norberto Bobbio, Silvana Borruti, Giacomo Marramao, Salvatore Natoli, Elena Pulcini, and Salvatore Veca, to name just a few). These figures and movements are either less prominent in the current Italian philosophical debate than they are abroad, already somewhat accessible and known outside

Italy, or, in some other, truly unfortunate cases, so little known outside Italy that it was hard to find contributors available to take them up.

It would be limiting to perceive the dialogue we are staging in this volume as unfolding in a unilateral direction, that is, with an emphasis purely on the Italian side of the discussion. Each chapter in the volume also engages with figures and issues that lie at the heart of continental philosophy. Italian thought must not be regarded as a mere supplement to or extension of the continental tradition; rather, it seriously challenges many of its recent developments: Esposito and Agamben challenge the biopolitical paradigm that Foucault introduced into philosophy, the social sciences, and activist circles; Sini and Vattimo rethink the legacy of hermeneutics; Lonzi and Muraro critique dominant forms of liberal and French feminisms that stress both equality and difference; Severino and Vitiello rethink what it means to do metaphysics; and Pareyson forces us to reevaluate the legacy of German Idealist and existentialist understandings of freedom.

When one employs geographical descriptors (Italian as well as French, German, Anglo-American, Japanese, etc.) to characterize, delimit, and thereby possibly restrict the universality of the philosophical quest, the risks of drifting into narrow-minded forms of nationalism, sovereignty, and the closures of identity politics are never completely absent. By focusing on the multilateral dialogues and the mutual contributions and engagements that unfold (and have unfolded) between Italian philosophy and various authors from the continental tradition, this volume aims at dispelling all such suspicions and ghosts of a past that is unfortunately still too ready to let itself be renewed. Despite the challenges, contributions, additions, revisions, expansions, and criticisms that Italian philosophy brings to the continental discussion, the intention of this volume is neither to extol the superiority of Italian thinkers nor to underline the inadequacies of other, non-Italian ways of doing philosophy. On the contrary, by featuring dialogues and conversations that involve a plurality of participants from across various borders, we aim to create a space where echoes, resonances, vibrancies, refractions, diffractions, and reverberations function to highlight points of richness and fecundity of each and every position. By presenting aspects of the perennial dialectics between particularity and universality, identity and difference, same and others that make up all true dialogues and conversations, this volume shows that if there are borders in place, they are in fact, and ought to be kept, *open* borders: borders that are there only to be crossed and to provide enrichment on all sides through the generosity offered by the act of crossing itself.

At the moment, there exists no volume that engages both Italian philosophy and the continental tradition in the (modes of) conversations that we present here. The contributions in the collection cover many

authors from a variety of backgrounds on various topics. Because of the range and, at times, even the indefinability of the geographical, national, ethnic, institutional, conceptual, or simply cultural backgrounds of the continental interlocutors, the Italian thinkers, and the contributors featured in this collection, we have avoided identifying and gathering the essays around “regions” of belonging (French, German, existentialist, phenomenological, feminist, metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, and so on). Although there may be borders of various kinds, our authors (as well as the thinkers on whom they reflect) immediately cross them in a variety of directions, and the content of the volume itself becomes a powerful representation of what the title suggests: an activity of passing, trespassing, and ultimately opening up all predetermined territorializations in order to generate new, kaleidoscopic configurations and collaborations. While there is an undeniable overlap of figures, issues, interests, concerns, approaches, and methodologies, we have decided to group the essays around themes of crossing, including being, time, subjectivity, biopolitics, and realism, to name a few. Since the act of crossing is a constitutive constant of the conversations we stage, none of the groupings is stable or final and other groupings could be imagined. One of the ambitions of the volume is actually to encourage the reader to conjure up other gatherings, other conversations, other border crossings.

A quick glance at the table of contents will certainly convey to the reader not only the multiplicity of thinkers collected here but also the wide spectrum of questions and issues that are examined. In *Living Thought*, Esposito typifies the uniqueness of Italian thought as being marked by a plurality of voices that tackle many of life’s most pressing questions and problems, from the problem of the vast power of states to control biological and political life to the environment and the migrant and refugee crisis. He also historically traces Italian thought as rising out of a break from medieval thought by Renaissance thinkers, who sought refuge in thought as a form of resistance and of thinking otherwise, for example, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Giambattista Vico. Yet as Bodei reminds us and Esposito would concur, what makes Italian philosophy different is its heavy emphasis on the human condition, especially the suffering and misery of the human situation.

Rootedness in the concreteness of the embodied human situation means that Italian thinkers never truly speculate in the abstract or theorize in isolation from what occurs in the broader philosophical—international but especially Italian—debate. Many of the positions of the Italian theorists who populate this volume in fact develop and unfold in response to one another, in concrete conversation, exchanges, and at times even altercations and polemics whose moments and passages would regrettably be too long

and complex to contextualize here.<sup>4</sup> As quick examples of the ongoing reciprocal resonances that spur and nourish Italian philosophy, we note that Gianni Vattimo's weak thought is, at least in part, a response both to the metaphysical residues of his teacher, Luigi Pareyson, and to the call to a more militant philosophy endorsed by a young Antonio Negri and other workerist theorists. Analogously, it is impossible to understand the deep motivations of Massimo Cacciari's negative dialectics in separation from his initial proximity and later distance from the philosophical and political positions of Antonio Negri or Mario Tronti. As for Emanuele Severino, his neo-Parmenidism and emphasis on the necessity of being can be better appreciated against the background of the postmetaphysical speculation found in Vattimo's weak thought and other theories of difference, becoming, and possibility understood as the core of Being, as found in Cacciari's or Vitiello's thought. As for Carla Lonzi, Luisa Muraro, and Adriana Cavarero, here too, their internally quite distinct emphasis on sexual difference, which in the 1980s generates the thought of sexual difference, unfolds as a radical objection to the alleged neutrality of what is, in fact, the male subject and his patriarchal way of thinking as exemplified by many prominent Italian theorists (who, in most cases, are men). In all these cases, Italian philosophy proves to be the outcome of—and hence the testimony to—the fruitfulness and creativity of the intersection of ideas, the circulation of thoughts, the exchange of experiences, and the interrelationality of all life dimensions. Italian philosophy is, ultimately, a matter of the open borders and border crossing characterizing the philosophical elaborations of its participants.

Each of the scholars who contributed a critical chapter to this volume works on Italian philosophy and is a specialist in continental thinking. Their affinities, scholarly interests, and specializations are diversified and enriched through their provenance from such varied geographical, cultural, and institutional environments as Canada, Colombia, Lithuania, Austria, Germany, Italy, and the United States. From this privileged scholarly position, each of the contributors stages an encounter and a conversation between two (or more) thinkers on fundamental aspects of the human condition, which are explored here in six sections.

The volume opens with a section devoted to some of the most classical, orthodox themes of philosophical speculation, namely, the notions of being, beings, and nothingness. Luigi Pareyson, Martin Heidegger, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling are the thinkers taken up in the first chapter of this section, "Luigi Pareyson's Ontology of Freedom: Encounters with Martin Heidegger and F. W. J. Schelling," by Silvia Benso. The philosophy of Luigi Pareyson (1918–1991), a Turinese thinker brought up in the personalist school of Augusto Guzzo, begins as a reflection on

existentialist themes and especially on Jaspers, whom Pareyson introduced into the Italian philosophical debate in the 1950s. Through a subsequent meditation on art and aesthetics focused on the notion of “formativity,” that is, of a “forming form” that guides artistic realizations both in terms of the artwork and of the artist’s production, Pareyson arrives at a hermeneutic philosophy in which the truth appears as the inexhaustible source of interpretations that are, at the same time, both particular—because they are always the outcome of a personal choice—and universal—because they are a disclosure of the truth. The truth, for Pareyson, presents itself not in the form of a rational account, but rather in the form of *mythos*, mythology or narrations, as understood in the Greek sense. Pareyson’s philosophical development concludes with an ontology of freedom, or tragic thought, in which freedom as the potentiality for goodness and evil is retraced to the core of the very notion of being. In Benso’s essay, Pareyson’s philosophy is disclosed as a radicalization of Heidegger, yet also one that moves beyond Heidegger and, in some ways, remedies one of Heidegger’s greatest shortcomings, namely, the inability to address the issue of evil in a satisfactory way, especially in light of the event of the Shoah. Whereas Heidegger understands freedom as human freedom in relation to being (but not to nothing) and thus is incapable of accounting for the evilness of nothingness, through his confrontation with Schelling, Pareyson understands being in relation to freedom as originary freedom, that is, freedom as both originary beginning and choice. This difference between the two thinkers accounts for the possibility, on Pareyson’s side, of presenting the evilness of nothingness as one of the alternatives among which originary freedom is free to choose when it comes to being and nothing. In other words, Pareyson’s position is capable of accounting for the power of the ontological destructiveness of nothingness (*Vernichtungung*), whereas Heidegger can only account for ontological nothingness as negativity (*Verneinung*). This is the deepest sense, Benso argues, of Pareyson’s ontology of freedom.

Emanuele Severino (1929–2020), another thinker about beings, being, and nothingness, is at the center of the following chapter by Alessandro Carrera, “Emanuele Severino versus Western Nihilism (A Guide for the Perplexed).” Severino’s philosophical position, which unfolds through numerous works devoted to the themes of nihilism, *techne*, Western philosophy, faith and religion, destiny, the will, power, and democracy, among others, can be understood as a form of neo-Parmenidism that denies the Greek notion of becoming in favor of being understood as unchanging. Carrera begins with Emanuele Severino’s apparently simple and straightforward definition of nihilism as the belief that something can come out of nothing and something can become nothing. As Carrera points out, what follows

from this simple proposition is that creation, change, possibility, agency, and the very notion of becoming are put to the test. With his much-debated return to Parmenides (Being is and non-Being is not), Severino takes an anti-Nietzschean and anti-Heideggerian stance that rejects the submission of Being to time or historicization. To Severino, Carrera explains, entities are eternal, the horizon where the entity appears is eternal, and the order whereby they hide or show themselves within the horizon of appearing is eternal too. Everything exists forever. Severino's philosophy is a shock to common sense, but it does not lack a logical foundation and it cannot be easily dismissed. Regardless of whether one accepts his premises, Severino is one of the strongest thinkers of total immanence, Carrera argues. That everything exists forever and everything is eternal does not mean that the empirical you and I are immortal; rather, at each moment, every slice of reality is and, therefore, is forever, since whatever is cannot come into being or cease to be. According to Carrera, Severino's antimetaphysical metaphysics, therefore, needs to be discussed in the context of post-Heideggerian metaphysics, Deleuzian immanence, Badiou's notion of the event, Meillassoux's speculative realism, the anticorrelationist trends, the currents of eternalism dating back to John McTaggart, the logic of possible worlds, and the theology of the death of God.

Gaetano Chiurazzi's chapter, which concludes the first section, is devoted to the ideas of Gianni Vattimo (1936) and Hans-Georg Gadamer. A student of Pareyson in Turin and of Gadamer in Heidelberg, Vattimo is most famous for his hermeneutic readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, which lead to the original standpoint of "weak thought" or an "ontology of actuality" in which the strong ontological structures of classical metaphysics are weakened in order to correspond to the needs of our postmetaphysical times. In "Increase or *Kenosis*: Hermeneutic Ontology between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gianni Vattimo," Chiurazzi argues that despite sharing a common Heideggerian heritage in terms of their understanding of being as time and the horizon of meaning, Gadamer and Vattimo are also very different because of the role that Nietzsche's thought plays in each of their philosophies. Chiurazzi sums up the difference between Gadamer and Vattimo in the opposition between increase, which characterizes Gadamer's ontology, and *kenosis*, which is central to Vattimo's position. Through an analysis of these two notions, Chiurazzi explores how the difference leads to two very specific understandings of the concept of interpretation.

With a departure prepared by the chapter on Vattimo's reflection on weak thought and interpretation, the second section in the volume turns the reader's attention from metaphysical and ontological themes toward spheres of existence that are more mundane and modest yet not

less significant, while engaging with topics of temporality, subjectivities, and performance. Ugo Perone, Edith Stein, and Martin Heidegger are the thinkers addressed in the first chapter in this section, which was written by Antonio Calcagno and is titled “Lingering Gifts of Time: Ugo Perone, Edith Stein, and Martin Heidegger’s Philosophical Legacy.” Perone (1945–), who, like Vattimo, was a student of Pareyson in Turin, is a philosopher operating in the hermeneutic tradition with a strong attention and loyalty to the notion of the human being and its finitude. Perone’s principal themes for reflection are the attempt at defining modernity, the issue of secularization, the question of the subject, and the themes of time, public space, and the relations between reason and feelings, philosophy and theology, and secular thought and religious inspiration. Calcagno draws on Martin Heidegger’s revolutionary way of thinking about time and its relation to being and examines the impact of Heidegger’s legacy on the positions of Perone and the German phenomenologist Edith Stein. Lingering and security emerge as an individual’s two fundamental comportments toward being, as revealed by both Stein’s and Perone’s analyses of the temporal dimension. Accepting both Stein’s and Perone’s conclusions about time, Calcagno engages the two thinkers, which leads him to argue for the possibility of an intimate relationship between lingering and security. Lingering requires a deep ontic sense of security in order for it to manifest itself, but lingering, in turn, conditions the intensity with which we feel the very security offered to us by being. Calcagno argues for a dialectical relationship between lingering and security that ultimately gives rise to a more meaningful relationship of one’s own being to itself, others, and the world.

The following chapter focuses on Remo Bodei and Jean-Luc Nancy, who are addressed by Alexander Bertland in “Failing to Imagine the Lives of Others: Remo Bodei and Jean-Luc Nancy on Citizenship and Sancho Panza.” Bodei (1938–2019) was a philosopher and historian of ideas who especially devoted himself to the study of the modern forms of individuality, the theory of passions and their political use, the genesis of the modern individual, the paradoxes of time and memory, forms of knowledge, aesthetics, the genesis of machine culture, and the possibility of a planetary ethics based on a minimal number of shared ethical norms. In his contribution, Bertland retraces Bodei’s discussion of the postmodern notion of the subject as singular in relation to a similar notion of singularity proposed by Nancy. For Nancy, the singular must be understood as a unique entity that lacks a definite connection to its past and thus is always open to the future. Bodei does not deny the openness of the singular; however, he asserts that the singular must acknowledge that alongside openness, there is an underlying stratum of coherence. The singular should mediate these two aspects of



itself. Thus, for Bodei, individuals need to learn by imagining the lives of others and must do so in a way that reflects practical reality. Bertland argues, then, that Bodei brings a sense of practical urgency to Nancy's ontology.

Carlo Sini and Michel Foucault are at the center of the following chapter by Enrico Redaelli, "A Political Gesture: The Performance of Carlo Sini and Michel Foucault," which concludes the second section. Sini (1933–) is a Milanese philosopher who studied with Enzo Paci—one of the most original Italian Marxist existentialists—and who, in the course of his long professional career, has been especially concerned with phenomenological thinking (from Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger), the hermeneutic problem, and the horizon of linguistic and semiotic thought. Most notably, Sini has devoted himself to reflection, inspired partly by Peirce, on the intertwining of practices and, more specifically, on the practice of writing and the ethics that such a practice generates. In his contribution, Redaelli shows how Sini's philosophy is to be understood as a political gesture, which is in many respects analogous to, but also radically different from, the thought of Michel Foucault. Like French poststructuralists, Sini too considers the subject to be the result of practices. As subjects, we are instituted and blinded by historically determined practices, which Foucault calls *dispositifs* (apparatuses) and Deleuze terms *machines*. These practices have shaped and transformed us, orienting our ways of life, thinking, and acting. The interweaving of practices, with their inherent or constitutive mistakes, constantly toys with us, ultimately designing precise, but always contingent, power relations. According to Redaelli, Sini's philosophy can be viewed as a political gesture that abolishes the aforementioned mistakes: "the mistakes of the sign," to borrow an expression from Sini himself. Sini's philosophy must be understood as a critical practice that is genealogical or constructive and that acts to problematize all that appears true, obvious, and natural or institutionally accepted or guaranteed. In the end, Sini's philosophy has one goal, namely, to bring the subject to the edge of itself in order to show such a subject the interweaving of habits, techniques, and truths that constitute and subjectivate him or her, ultimately generating different ways of being a subject.

Thinking, estrangement, and ideologies are the themes that organize the following section, which opens with a chapter by Richard A. Lee Jr. devoted to Antonio Gramsci and Gilles Deleuze. Gramsci (1891–1937) was a Marxist philosopher and politician, perhaps most famous for his reflections on the role of the intellectual in society and for his attempt at breaking away from the determinism found in much traditional Marxist thought. In "What Does It Mean to Think? Antonio Gramsci and Gilles

Deleuze,” Lee brings Gramsci and Deleuze into a conversation about the general question of “how to think the real.” Lee views “the real” not just as that which actually exists, but also as that which is effective. Therefore, structures are real because they are effective. In this way, the real is not constituted by identity, but rather by effectivity. The essay brings Gramsci and Deleuze into dialogue by focusing on how each deals with creativity, assembly, and reality. The conversation that Lee unfolds, however, is not a mere “compare and contrast” exercise; rather, it is productive in that it may enable us to discover why these issues are crucial for us. In the end, Lee argues that Gramsci may be in a better position than Deleuze to analyze the effectivity of structures, an analysis that is crucial for our times.

The section continues with a chapter on Franco “Bifo” Berardi and Herbert Marcuse, who are at the center of the essay by Michael E. Gardiner, “Herbert Marcuse in Italy.” Gardiner examines key themes in Marcuse’s work through the lens of Italian autonomist thinker “Bifo” Berardi (1949–). Berardi, who studied aesthetic theory under the guidance of Luciano Anceschi in Bologna and there met Antonio Negri, has been a prominent actor in the Italian autonomist, extraparliamentary, workerist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. He has devoted much of his philosophical production to an analysis of the role of the media and information technology in the postindustrial capitalist world while focusing his attention on the role that emotions, desires, and embodied communication play in the production of the consumption patterns that sustain the market economy. As Gardiner highlights, Berardi is critical of what he takes to be the Hegelian and Freudian residues in Marcuse’s thought. Specifically, he asserts that the concept of alienation must now be abandoned. Similarly, with regard to Marcuse’s thesis of instinctual renunciation, according to Berardi, liberation cannot be vouchsafed by the elimination of “surplus repression.” Yet Gardiner argues that at the same time, Berardi glosses over certain anticipations of autonomist ideas in Marcuse’s writings, especially when the latter draws on Marx’s *Grundrisse* in order to evoke what autonomists later referred to as the “general intellect.” Similarly, Marcuse foresees and theorizes the subsumption of desire in work and consumption, which is a key autonomist insight, through what he calls “repressive desublimation.”

Concluding the section is a chapter by Erik M. Vogt devoted to Mario Perniola in dialogue with Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pfaller. After studying aesthetic theory in Turin with Pareyson, Perniola (1941–2018) came in contact with the Situationist International founded by Guy Debord in Paris and developed his own philosophical position, which was focused on the concept of simulacra as opposed to the traditionally metaphysical distinction of being and appearing. His philosophy has always been open to the

most problematic, alienating, allegedly negative sides of the contemporary situation. Among the topics he studied were sexuality, embodiment, and the world, but also communication media and, most recently, the worlds of religion and politics, yet without neglecting more synthetic overviews of the role of art in modern times. In “Engaging Contemporary Ideology with Mario Perniola, Slavoj Žižek, and Robert Pfaller,” Vogt examines how, according to Perniola, the notion of experience that lies at the center of contemporary Western society is to be grasped in terms of an inversion between humans and things, the organic and the inorganic. This inversion has not only affected knowledge, belief, and action but also, and above all, feeling, in that feeling has been subjected to a profound process of reification. This transformation of feeling has to be related to the emergence of a collective and socialized sensory horizon before which all modes of feeling seem to take on the guise of something already-felt. Perniola defines the quasi-transcendental-schematic status of the already-felt as *sensology*. Sensology not only entertains complex relations with the notions of ideology, *mediocracy*, and *specularism*, but it has also differentiated into multiple cultures or styles of the already-felt that, in concert with mass communication, exhibit a striving for totality that seems to render impossible lines of flight from contemporary totalistic society. Vogt highlights how Perniola manages to unearth impersonal and anonymous modes of feeling, harboring the potential for displacing the grip of sensology in that they suggest nonmetaphysical relationships between feeling and thinking as well as feeling and acting. Moreover, Vogt argues, Perniola’s elaboration of a historical anthropology of externalized and ritualized feeling exhibits affinities with the notion of interpassivity elaborated by Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pfaller. Vogt presents some of these affinities in light of the urgent task of reaffirming the necessity of a public-symbolic realm of appearances.

The theme of the political, which constitutes a major focus of the preceding section, continues in part four, which is devoted to community, apocalypse, and the political. The section begins with a chapter on Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy by María del Rosario Acosta López. In recent years, and possibly more abroad than in Italy, Agamben (1942–) has become a well-known voice in the political-philosophical debates that are focused on the notions of community, sovereign power, the state of exception, forms of life, *homo sacer*, and biopolitics. In “Between the Inoperative and the Coming Community: Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben on the Task of Ontology,” Acosta López engages in a dialogue with Nancy’s and Agamben’s works on community, and her essay emphasizes the role that the concept of community plays in the move of both thinkers from politics to ontology. According to Acosta López, in the work of both Nancy

and Agamben, the question of being in common is linked not only to a critique of ontology but also to a new critical ontology and even to an *ontology as critique*.

Pietro Pirani's chapter, "Who Can Hold the Apocalypse? Massimo Cacciari, Carl Schmitt, and the *Katechon*," identifies a central aspect of the contemporary debate in political theory in the relationship between theology and politics. Pirani addresses Massimo Cacciari's more recent work, *Il potere che frena* (*The Withholding Power*), and his reflections on the concept of political theology. Cacciari (1944), who is both an academic philosopher trained in art and aesthetic theory and a public figure who has devoted much of his life to active politics, has produced scholarly works that span over narrowly defined disciplines and extend to architecture, literature, political theory, theology, and philosophy through a strong reevaluation of nondialectical thought. In his essay, Pirani compares Cacciari's understanding of the *katechon* (the withholding power) to Carl Schmitt's classical interpretation. Whereas for Schmitt the restraining power of the *katechon* is a stabilizing force that aims at repelling the external foe, for Cacciari the *katechon* is an expression of the Christian eschatological view. The *katechon*, then, is inherently characterized by a tension between *potestas* (power) and *auctoritas* (authority) that jeopardizes the stability of the *polis* (the city or community) from within. According to Pirani, by reading Cacciari's latest works we become able to address one of the major weaknesses of contemporary theories of secularization: their incapacity to detect the implicit secularizing movement already present and at work in Christian theological categories.

The concluding chapter in the section stages a confrontation between Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou. A political theorist and militant activist in the workerist and autonomist movements, where he came in contact with Cacciari and Berardi, in addition to Mario Tronti, Negri (1933–) has become world renowned in recent years because of his analysis of globalization, the neoliberal economy, the idea of multitude as the set of social subjects enslaved to global capitalism, the concept of permanent global conflict and emergency understood as mechanisms to control productive and financial forces, and the delineation of social subjects that are capable of building an alternative global democracy. In "Movements or Events? Antonio Negri versus Alain Badiou on Politics," Christian Lotz argues that although Negri (and Hardt) are usually identified as a "nondogmatic" version of post-Marxism, their position can be identified with the attempt to offer a contemporary vision of Marxist thought that, at least to some extent, remains true to its basis, namely, the connection between Marxist social theory and political philosophy. Accordingly, for them political thought can only be understood in connection with a theory of subjectivity

and labor defined by recent developments in global capitalism. In contradiction, and seen from the problem of how to combine social theory, political economy, and political thought, Badiou appears as furthest away from a Marxian social base (broadly defined). The reason for this distance lies in the fact that one of his central claims is that politics needs to be rethought as a “true” politics, which he conceives of as independent from questions of social form and social-economic structure. Lotz argues that Negri’s concept of the political in connection with the social is far superior to Badiou’s regressive concept of communist politics. Siding with Negri, Lotz suggests that Badiou’s political thinking should be rejected due to its empty abstractions, and instead, Negri’s model of thinking about the political in connection with the social should be favored.

The fifth section is devoted to voices of difference: women philosophers whose activities originated and intersected in the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, principally in Milan, Rome, and Verona, and produced distinct theoretical positions of broad philosophical latitude that can nevertheless perhaps be gathered under the shared descriptor, “thinking of sexual difference.” The section opens with a chapter by Maria Luisa Boccia on Carla Lonzi (1931–1982), an early feminist theoretician belonging to the Roman group *Rivolta Femminile* (Women’s Rebellion). In the early 1970s, when the notion of sexual difference was not widely entertained and the complications of that concept brought about by queer theory and intersectionality were still entirely untheorized and perhaps even unimaginable, Lonzi declared the need for women to start from their differences and inequalities with respect to men and use those differences as standpoints from which to elaborate and vindicate political goals that respond to the specificity of women’s concrete needs and desires. In “A Critique of the Forms of Political Action: Carla Lonzi and G. W. F. Hegel,” Boccia examines Carla Lonzi’s treatment of the differentiation of sexes in relation to Hegel’s concepts of individuality, struggle, power, domination, and the political sphere. Lonzi maintains that these notions, as they are elaborated by Hegel, work at erasing sexual difference precisely by neutralizing it through its subsumption into the universal. The goal of Lonzi’s critique of the (Hegelian) notion of the political sphere is to claim that sexual difference pertains to the human being, understood both as an individual and as a species. Lonzi is interested in grasping the manifestation of a woman’s “I,” who finds within herself the principle and sense of her own being, understood as a sexed being. This leads Lonzi to formulate the concept of an “I” that is turned to the world in order to redefine its codes, forms, and relations. According to Boccia, Lonzi remains loyal to this thematic core and does so in forms and ways that are rarely found in other feminist thinkers. There

is, for Lonzi, no “woman problem” as such; rather, there exists the problem that belongs to this and/or that specific woman of thinking of herself as “a woman Self” and positing herself as such in the world. Lonzi’s thought, as well as her practice, which is inseparable from her thinking, are faithful to the demand to elaborate forms in which the woman subject can speak and posit herself as an “I.” Herein lies the power of her critique of the abstract and universal forms of politics.

Luisa Muraro and Luce Irigaray are at the center of Elvira Roncalli’s “*C’è Altro: Luisa Muraro on the Symbolic of Sexual Difference along and beyond Luce Irigaray.*” Muraro (1940–) has been one of the animating voices behind the Milan-based *Libreria delle Donne* (Women’s Bookstore), a women’s bookstore collective devoted to the theoretical elaboration of the thought of sexual difference. Specifically, Muraro theorizes the figure of the mother—once it is liberated of the symbolisms assigned to it by the patriarchal tradition—as the place where a women’s genealogy, as based on the nonconflictual mother-daughter relationship, can be created. In her contribution, Roncalli begins by acknowledging that Muraro’s thinking has been deeply inspired and informed by Irigaray’s thought on sexual difference and by the need for a female genealogy. A fundamental place and practice to which Muraro is also deeply indebted is the *Libreria delle Donne* in Milan, which was a stronghold of feminine experience and learning where the politics of women relationships was practiced in a concrete way. Roncalli explores both these roots in Muraro’s work and examines how they lead to what Muraro calls the need for a “symbolic revolution,” that is, a radical transformation of the order of thought and language. It becomes apparent that while both Muraro and Irigaray see the recovery and reinvention of the mother-daughter relationship as necessary for such a transformation to happen, they do not necessarily agree on the way in which this is to come about.

The section concludes with a chapter on the philosophical positions of Adriana Cavarero and Hannah Arendt. After participating, in the 1980s, in the Verona-based philosophical group *Diotima*, which focused on the elaboration of a theory of sexual difference that was strongly influenced by the French feminism of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, Cavarero (1947–) shifted her attention to the themes of language, narration, and storytelling as ways to give direct, broad philosophical expression, at least in part, to women’s voices otherwise suppressed by the male-dominated discursive horizon. In “Adriana Cavarero and Hannah Arendt: Singular Voices and Horrifying Narratives,” Peg Birmingham examines the ways in which Cavarero’s relational ontology relies upon and departs from Arendt’s thinking of the in-between by specifically focusing on Cavarero’s insistence

on the primacy of voice, her thinking of vulnerability and violence, and her reading of Arendt's notion of superfluosity. Birmingham also raises the question of Cavarero's engagement with the Italian Marxist tradition, given Arendt's debt to Marx, especially in her analysis of the economic conditions understood as constitutive elements of the origins of totalitarianism. Birmingham concludes by addressing the concern with care and horror as fundamental affects in Cavarero's relational ontology while interrogating their contribution to Arendt's own analysis of horror as the affect that today provokes thinking.

The concluding section of the volume is devoted to specific examinations of the themes of topology, the new realism, and biopolitics—these being some of the conceptual formulations through which Italian philosophers have confronted and contrasted the perceived shortcomings of the metaphysical, modern tradition with original, novel concepts and positions. Giulio Goria's opening chapter, "Topology at Play: Vincenzo Vitiello and the Word of Philosophy," takes up Vincenzo Vitiello (1935) and his relationship to Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. Vitiello's thought has focused on the themes of nihilism, modernity, the concept of space, and the notion of possibility understood as both the possibility of the impossible *and* the enabling possibility—an "and" that, for Vitiello, constitutes the contradiction that thought cannot think (and, hence, that also represents its limit). In his contribution, Goria addresses Vitiello's most original philosophical proposal, namely topology, starting from Vitiello's main areas of theoretical concern, that is, philosophy, art, and religion. Within these areas, Vitiello's thought unfolds in the direction of a unique goal: topology understood as a philosophical machine aimed at detecting the indeterminate "X" that underlies Western thought. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the indeterminate is the *noumenon*; in Heidegger's works, it is indeterminate potency; and in the main directions pursued by twentieth-century pictorial art and poetical experiences, it is the expression of the material power of colors and sounds, of bodily tension and gestures. Goria examines Vitiello's account of these historical and philosophical turning points and suggests that topology, a key notion in Vitiello's thought, arises from a radicalization of the anti-Aristotelian operation of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in which possibility is primary over reality. Like Heidegger, Vitiello is focused on preserving the indeterminacy of possibility. Topology encounters ontology and, in particular, contradiction. As Goria maintains, speaking the contradiction encapsulates the sense of Vitiello's overall program of research and, at the same time, the ethical attitude of his philosophy.

The section continues with an examination of Italian postmodernism as represented by Gianni Vattimo's weak thought, which we contextualized

previously in this essay, and Maurizio Ferraris's recent proposal of new realism as a way to combat postmodernism. Ferraris (1956–), a student of Vattimo who was initially educated in the hermeneutic and deconstructionist tradition, subsequently embraced a form of realistic objectivism that is rooted in the analytic tradition and based on the recognition of a sphere of reality that is independent of interpretations. Ferraris's "new realism," as he has named it, presents itself as an antidote to postmodern, deconstructionist alleged degenerations and is inspired by the interaction of three concepts: ontology, critique, and enlightenment. The two philosophical currents of Vattimo's weak thought and Ferraris's new realism are at the center of the chapter by Rita Šerpytytė, titled "On the Question of the Face of Reality: Addressing the 'Myths' of the New Realism and Postmodernity." In this chapter, Šerpytytė starts from the conviction that the controversy between the two positions and their mutual critique is based on the criterion of *reality* that each of them posits. Yet the criterion of *reality*, which raises the question of the end of postmodernity, is in itself quite problematic. As an important landmark standing between postmodernism and new realisms, such a criterion leads Šerpytytė to ask, What kind of reality are we talking about? She shows that Vattimo understands reality in terms of "*effettualità* (effectiveness)" or "*attualità* (actuality)" (*Wirklichkeit*). That is, from its very beginning, "weak thought" is taken and treated (from the point of view of reality) as a performative philosophy, with an orientation to reality as actuality. Meanwhile, the "game" of the new realism, the "recovery" of *reality* for which Ferraris's thought is an introduction, is focused on the restoration of the ontological significance of perception. Šerpytytė's question then becomes whether postmodernism and the new realism address the same reality. The new realism, which is clearly affected by what Šerpytytė refers to as Nietzschean neurosis, attempts to grasp reality, insofar as it provides a new *interpretation* of perception. Conversely, Vattimo focuses on the issue of the relationship between the move toward so-called second-degree reality and reality. According to Šerpytytė, the question continues to spiral within the realm of the distinction between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit* that is drawn by Kant and Hegel. Šerpytytė argues that Vattimo alone, being encouraged by Nietzsche and Heidegger, attempts to take a step forward, whereas Ferraris's "new" realism takes us back to the old dispute between Jacobi and his contemporaries.

The volume concludes with a chapter by Roberto Esposito (1950–), whose words have been cited at the beginning of this introduction, thus bringing this collection full circle. In "Deconstruction or Biopolitics," Esposito addresses the Italian paradigm of biopolitics in relation to Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. He focuses on two interrelated questions: the relationship of the Derridean paradigm of deconstruction to the Foucault-



ian model of biopolitics, and the relationship between French Theory and Italian Thought, a recent theoretical paradigm focused on notions of *bios* (life), biopolitics, conflict, the common, processes of governmentality and subjectivation, among others. Contrary to the widely held thesis maintaining that both relations are contiguous or continuous, Esposito argues that to understand the specificity of the paradigms of deconstruction and biopolitics, one must return them to the originary tension that differentiates them. This move does not amount to privileging one paradigm over the other, nor should it be seen, with respect to Derrida and Foucault specifically, as undermining the recognition due to two of the great philosophical masters of the twentieth century. One must remain faithful, Esposito claims, to a heterogeneity that neither thinker has ever hidden; it is only by examining this heterogeneity that it becomes possible to recognize the tense relationship between French Theory and Italian Thought. Despite all its undeniable debts and lexical contaminations, Italian Thought is born not from the development of French Theory, but from the crisis within it: a crisis that Italian Thought intensifies.

It is our hope as editors that, through this collection of essays, our readers will not only expand their knowledge and thinking about figures and issues explored in this volume, but will also be moved by what they encounter and read so that they may in turn critique, develop, and even initiate new ways of questioning and thinking, hopefully for the betterment of the human condition that the essays in the collection address. We all operate within our own borders in that every age and culture gathers and reworks received philosophies, for better or for worse. Yet our borders need not be constraining boundaries. We believe that the dialogue we have brought forward in this collection not only makes a contribution to our understanding of a lively and dynamic philosophical movement in Italy but can also bear fruit and help improve the world we dwell in together and in common, resulting in more open borders.

## Notes

1. Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Thought*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1.
2. Remo Bodei, "Dall'Italia," in *La filosofia nel Novecento (e oltre)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006), 210.
3. Bodei, 211.
4. For a first-person account of the philosophical positions and developments of many of the Italian thinkers addressed in this volume, see Silvia Benso, *Viva Voce: Conversations with Italian Philosophers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), and the bibliographical information contained therein.