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COMPOSTING CONTEMPORARY METAPHILOSOPHY WITH FEMINIST PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES: TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF PHILOSOPHY'S CONCRETENESS

by Giovanna Miolli*

Abstract. *Against the charge of abstractness leveled at philosophy, in this article, I argue for philosophy's concreteness. To this end, I compost perspectives from contemporary metaphilosophy with feminist philosophical proposals (particularly, I refer to bell hooks, Rosi Braidotti, Kristie Dotson, and Donna J. Haraway). In sections 2 and 3, I present my theoretical tools: compost methodology and a Hegel-inspired notion of concreteness, which includes features such as complexity, involvement in transformative processes, intrinsic relationality, explanatory power, and effectiveness. I then outline how such characters are involved in (a) practicing (meta)philosophical theory and (b) producing philosophical methodologies. Specifically, in sections 4, 5, and 6, I consider the 'real consequences' of doing philosophy in terms of creating systems of relationships between people, concepts, and knowledges, while in section 7 and its subsections, I examine an innovative aspect of feminist methodology, its emphasis on combining critique with imagination. I discuss how this feature operates at the intersection of cartographic and genealogical methods and in the use of figurations. Based on my analysis in this section, I expose philosophy's capacity to produce 'content-methodologies' as performative models to be inhabited and activated.*

Keywords. *Contemporary Metaphilosophy; New Feminist Materialisms; Philosophical Methodology; Composting; Concreteness*

1. Introduction

Philosophy is often associated with thinking in an ivory tower – isolated, elitist, abstract, and snobby. Philosophers fall into holes while looking at the sky, talk nebulously, and think boringly. Metaphilosophy's reputation can be even worse. It is the

* University of Padua

philosophy of philosophy¹. This definition could evoke an image of philosophers immersed in contemplating their navels, producing nothing but meta-abstractions in the meta-ivory tower.

Indeed, contemporary (institutionalized) philosophy must regularly face criticism of abstractness (and, relatedly, uselessness). Caught up in a mixture of performance anxiety and discouragement, scholars attempt to piece together the most baroque justifications of why philosophical inquiry is worth pursuing and funding, framing such stories within the recently established academic literary genre called ‘research project application’². Confronting demands for impact, applicability, exploitation, and patentability, philosophy seems to offer less convincing answers than other disciplines.

The charge of abstractness leveled at philosophy encompasses many connected issues: philosophy is alleged to be detached from reality and real-world problems, to have no immediate and tangible relevance to society and no application to everyday life, and to be unnecessarily complicated and involuted³. A picture of philosophy squashed into sterile theorizing, incapable of producing practical acts that affect so-called reality, emerges.

These criticisms come from different scientific, political, and social-educational contexts. They have been expressed by experts in other disciplines (a striking example is Stephen Hawking’s proclamation that philosophy is dead⁴), but these censures have also gained ground outside disciplinary academic discourse. Many research and journalistic articles have connected such

¹ See T. Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2007. I regard the terms *metaphilosophy* and *philosophy of philosophy* as synonyms, understanding metaphilosophy as an activity *within* philosophy and not above or beyond it.

² For an analysis of the complex relationship between philosophy and (its) literary genres, see F. Campana, *La filosofia, i generi letterari e le possibilità della scrittura*, in *Ermeneutica tra letteratura e filosofia nel Novecento*, ed. by G. Abbadessa, Napoli, IISF Press (forthcoming).

³ See D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, Torino, Einaudi, 2014; P. Kitcher, *Philosophy Inside Out*, «Metaphilosophy», XLII (3), 2011, pp. 248-260.

⁴ See S. Hawking and L. Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, New York, Bantam Press, 2010, p. 5.

preconceptions with state policies that defund philosophy and the humanities, reprioritizing resources on supposedly more job-relevant disciplines⁵.

Contemporary metaphilosophy is receptive to these issues. They are problematized in regard to topics such as philosophy's need for public and scientific legitimation and its difficulty in engaging with non-philosophical areas and society at large. Seeking to probe the problems of their own field of study, scholars develop prescriptive answers about what philosophy should be, which methods it should adopt, and why it should be pursued⁶. Explicit metaphilosophical inquiries⁷ focus predominantly on Western metaphilosophy – that is, European and North American⁸. For the most part, (though not completely), they tend to overlook «'traditionalist philosophy', which devotes itself to the study of 'the grand [...] tradition of Western philosophy ranging from the Pre-Socratics to Kant'»⁹ and perspectives such as feminist philosophies, which have great metaphilosophical influence through the re-discussion, transformation, and reimagination of philosophy and

⁵ See, for example, M.C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2010; P. Redding, *Philosophy is not a 'ridiculous' pursuit. It is worth funding*, «The Guardian», September 17, 2013 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/17/defence-philosophy-abbott>); J. Weinberg, *Philosophy, Employment, and the Public Good (guest post by Alison Assiter)*, «Daily Nous. News for and about the Philosophy Profession», July 22, 2020 (<https://dailynous.com/2020/07/22/philosophy-employment-public-good-guest-post-alison-assiter/>).

⁶ See S. Overgaard, P. Gilbert and S. Burwood, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁷ Such *explicit* metaphilosophical inquiries are distinct from the *implicit* metaphilosophical aspects contained in philosophical positions. On the distinction between implicit and explicit metaphilosophy, see N. Joll, *Metaphilosophy*, «Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy», 2017 (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/con-meta/>, first published 17/11/2010, last revised 01/08/2017), section 1.c.

⁸ See *ivi*, section 1. *Colonial North American* would be a more precise phrase. Indigenous peoples here have their own philosophical traditions that are culturally distinct from Western hegemony and not widely focused on in such inquiries.

⁹ *Ivi*, section 1.d. Here, Joll quotes from H.-J. Glock, *What Is Analytic Philosophy?*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 85.

philosophical practices. These approaches, comments Nicholas Joll in his entry *Metaphilosophy* in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, «seem to at least warrant their own categories»¹⁰.

I think that feminist philosophy can strongly contribute to contemporary metaphilosophical reflection by working against this separation among research fields. For example, feminist theorization can play an important role in developing a response to the criticism of abstractness directed at philosophy. In accordance with this line of thought, my aim here is to argue for philosophy's concreteness. To this end, I will compost perspectives from contemporary metaphilosophy with feminist philosophical proposals, without assuming that anything 'warrants its own categories'.

First, I will present my theoretical tools. I will explain the main characteristics of *compost methodology* and *string figures* as they have emerged from Donna Haraway's volume *Staying with the Trouble* (section 1). Composting will serve as a methodological thread throughout this text. Next, I will propose a *Hegel-inspired notion of concreteness* that overturns the common understanding of the terms *abstract* and *concrete* (section 2). This notion includes features such as complexity, involvement in transformative processes, intrinsic relationality, explanatory power, and effectiveness (the capability of producing effects).

On that basis, I will begin composting contemporary metaphilosophy with feminist proposals to discuss some aspects of philosophy's (and metaphilosophy's!) concreteness. The analysis will address two main themes: (a) doing (meta)philosophical theory and its 'real consequences' and (b) philosophy's methodology. Regarding the first theme, I will focus on identifying philosophical theorizing's concrete nature (sections 4-6). In particular, I will highlight how philosophical theorizing creates systems of relationships between people, concepts, and knowledges. To highlight this function, I will consider the metaphilosophical discussion of philosophy's theoretical priorities and show how this discourse involves the establishment of centers and peripheries. I will

¹⁰ Joll, *Metaphilosophy*, section 1.d.

intertwine this analysis with bell hooks's interpretation of theory as practice¹¹ and with Kristie Dotson's theses on the impact of certain metaphilosophical presuppositions that risk making philosophical investigation unsuitable for understanding complexity¹². In this first part, I will underline theory-making's non-neutral and accountable character, as well as its relational and effect-producing dimension.

With respect to the second theme (sections 7-7.3), I will examine the problem of philosophical methodology – one of the most debated and central points of contemporary metaphilosophical reflection. In this part, I will discuss an innovative aspect of feminist methodology, namely its emphasizing the combination of critique and imagination. I will show how this trait plays out at the intersection of cartographic and genealogical methods and in the use of figurations. This part will reveal philosophy's capacity to produce what I call *content-methodologies* – that is, embodied and embedded methods that do not stand as mere formal procedures but become inhabited as models for the invention and experimentation of new, life-changing practices and concepts. In this part, I will refer specifically to proposals emerging within the frame of «third-wave feminist materialism»¹³, or feminist neo-materialism. Among these proposals, I include Rosi Braidotti's critical posthumanism¹⁴ and Haraway's view developed in *Staying with the Trouble*, which is in consonance with Karen Barad's agential realism¹⁵. It is not possible here to articulate a detailed account of all of these positions;

¹¹ bell hooks, *Theory as Liberatory Practice*, «Yale Journal of Law and Feminism», IV (1), 1991, pp. 1-12.

¹² K. Dotson, *Word to the Wise: Notes on a Black Feminist Metaphilosophy*, «Philosophy Compass», XI (2), 2016, pp. 69-74.

¹³ R. Braidotti, *Feminist Philosophy*, in *The Continuum Companion to Continental Philosophy*, ed. by J. Mullarkey and B. Lord, London-New York, Continuum, 2009, pp. 166-187, p. 171.

¹⁴ See R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge (UK)-Malden (MA), Polity Press, 2013.

¹⁵ See K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007. It is important here to keep in mind the twofold disciplinary background of Haraway and Barad, who are both scientists and philosophers.

however, to situate the following analyses in a specific theoretical context, fixing (not at all exhaustively) some of the features shared by these philosophical proposals is important. Specifically, these shared features are: the thesis on the nature-culture continuum; an assumption of knowledge's (or knowledges') situatedness; an integration with recent, non-deterministic evolutionary theories (e.g., ecological evolutionary developmental biology), which Haraway includes in the so-called «Extended Evolutionary Synthesis' unfolding in the early twenty-first century»¹⁶, as distinguished from the Modern Synthesis; and the adoption of non-linear causal models that can address complexity¹⁷.

Complexity is a key term here: the issue at hand is the mutual co-constitution (or 'intra-action'¹⁸) of the semiotic and the material¹⁹. The study of these processes fits into a complex, multi-layered present of non-linear and contradictory dynamics: «a globally connected and technologically mediated world that is marked by fast changes»²⁰, a «web-like, scattered and poly-centered» global economy, «multi-directional relationality»²¹ that structures subjects, and the advancements of information technologies and bio-genetics.

In the thesis of the nature-culture continuum, these positions are intended to overcome the nature-versus-culture dualism. At the same time, these positions inherit from poststructuralist and

¹⁶ D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 63. See also L. Margulis and R. Fester (eds.), *Symbiosis as a Source of Evolutionary Innovation: Speciation and Morphogenesis*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1991, and T. Pievani, *How to Rethink Evolutionary Theory: A Plurality of Evolutionary Patterns*, «Evolutionary Biology», XLIII, 2016, pp. 446-455.

¹⁷ See S. Frost, *The Implication of the New Materialism for Feminist Epistemology*, in *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, ed. by H.A. Grasswick, Dordrecht, Springer, 2011, pp. 69-83.

¹⁸ See K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the nature-culture continuum and its methodological implications, see S. Frost, *The Implication of the New Materialism for Feminist Epistemology*.

²⁰ Braidotti, *Feminist Philosophy*, p. 166.

²¹ Ead., *The Posthuman*, p. 165.

postmodern feminism the theoretical legacy of knowledge's situatedness and the critique of false models of epistemic universality and neutrality, thus anchoring knowledge-production processes and epistemic positioning to ethical accountability.

The thesis of the nature-culture continuum is further supported by recent evolutionary developmental theories, which account for «creative form[s] of evolution»²². Such theories evidence relationalities' ontological priority over entities or units and manage to account for processes such as «sympoiesis, symbiosis, symbiogenesis, development, webbed ecologies»²³, in which 'entities' (or, more precisely, «quasi-collective/quasi-individual partners») ²⁴ are defined by the entanglement of relations that traverse and constitute them. «The partners do not precede the relatings»²⁵. Moreover, such theories shed light on matter's intelligent, inherently relational, affective, transformative, and autopoietic structure, thus providing material for a monist, vitalist philosophical position (such as Braidotti's) or a compostist-sympoietic, materialistic view (such as Haraway's in *Staying with the Trouble*).

With this theoretical backdrop in mind, I can now define *compost methodology*.

2. *Compost Methodology*

Donna Haraway does not define *composting* or *compost methodology*; rather, she puts them in place throughout the volume *Staying with the Trouble*. From how she employs these terms, we can infer some of their main characteristics.

Composting has many dimensions, including (but not limited to) ontological, epistemic, and methodological²⁶. Composting is

²² Ead., *Feminist Philosophy*, p. 171.

²³ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 49. For a presentation and discussion of all these notions, see *ivi*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

²⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 64.

²⁵ *Ibidem*. See also Braidotti, *Feminist Philosophy*, p. 171.

²⁶ Importantly, composting is also a deconstructive and regenerative notion in Haraway's volume: it functions as a critique of anthropocentrism and human

ontological because it constitutes a material entanglement of practices that reconfigures reality. In Haraway's terms, it is 'wordling', world-making. Compost is a multi-species and 'multi-material-semiotic' assemblage that involves the human and the non-human (including technological), and it takes place through what Haraway calls 'sympoietic practices'²⁷. These practices are collaborative, creative relations in which the participating 'quasi-individual partners' are transformed and 'become-with' each other, making themselves mutually adept in cultivating *response-ability*: «the capacity to respond to worldly urgencies with each other»²⁸.

At the same time, composting is an epistemic practice. Sympoietic practices involve not only «becoming-with each other» but also «thinking-with»²⁹ as collective knowing. We can better understand the epistemic dimension of compost if we describe it with another expression as an 'entanglement of stories'. Stories, for Haraway (whose theoretical background in this analysis is Karen Barad's agential realism), are not mere 'enunciations' but material epistemic acts or practices that contribute to rearranging the material-semiotic continuum. Haraway also denotes this entanglement of stories, of which the world is made, with the expressions «cat's cradle» or «string games»³⁰. In this entanglement

exceptionalism. The terminology of *composting* aims to return the *homo*, the *anthropos*, back to the *humus* – the earth. In other words, composting intends to deconstruct the 'astralized' version of himself that man (as an alleged universal) has produced, elevating himself above the living and the non-living. The language of *composting* dismantles the double meaning of 'exceptional' for which man would be extraordinary or superior and unique. See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 11, 33; see also pp. 170-171, fn. 3.

²⁷ See Ivi, p. 58: «*Sympoiesis* is a simple word; it means "making-with." Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. [...] *Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company».

²⁸ Ivi, p. 7.

²⁹ Ivi, respectively p. 3 and p. 34.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 14. A dual language of 'composting' and 'threads' seems to emerge here. I understand these two aspects as complementary. They help to capture related issues with different emphasis. In my view, the discourse about *composting* underscores the ontological dimension of sympoietic practices, while the language of

or cat's cradle, quasi-individual partners compose 'string figures'. Haraway offers the figurations of string figures to explain the intrigue of composting's onto-epistemic practices, as well as its methodological dimension³¹.

Haraway takes the *cat's cradle* and *string figure game* terminology from existing practices that European and Euro-American ethnologists have documented in different parts of the world. For Haraway, these figures embody «*thinking* as well as *making* practices»³² while also providing methodological resources. String figures are tools *with which* to think and do; they offer a methodology that confronts complexity and emphasizes practices' accountable, situated character and non-neutrality. First, string figures are *patterns of thought-action-creation to inhabit and activate*³³. Second, their composition is *situated* and non-neutral³⁴. How onto-epistemic practices are composted makes a difference! String figures embody specific, situated relationships connected to specific responsibilities and response-abilities, «the specificity and proximity of connections matters – *who we are bound up with and in what ways*»³⁵. Third, string figures are not closed or 'exhausted'. Instead, they are *open* figures from which 'threads hang', soliciting a response. These

threads and *entanglement* points to the epistemic and accountable dimension of these practices.

³¹ Haraway's volume is littered with enactments of sympoietic string figures. Examples are the *PigeonBlog* project (ivi, pp. 20-29), the Crochet Coral Reef project (ivi, pp. 76-81); the Ako Project (ivi, pp. 81-86), the *Never Alone* computer game project (ivi, pp. 86-89); the «many-threaded coalitional work» in «the Black Mesa and the Navajo and Hopi lands enmeshed in Arizona» (ivi, p. 71; see pp. 89-97). The unfolding of Haraway's own thought, the onto-epistemic practice she deploys throughout the book, is an example of sympoietic practice: the author composts different disciplines, species, technologies, artistic practices, activisms, performances of memory, symanimagenic practices, etc., emphasizing the mutually transformative processes at work.

³² Ivi, p. 14.

³³ See ivi, p. 10.

³⁴ See ivi, pp. 14-15.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 173 (fn. 2 of chap. 2). Here, Haraway is quoting T. Van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life at the Edge of Extinction*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 60.

dangling threads call to continue, transmit, or cut relational practices within shared responsibility³⁶. Suspended threads prompt further action, decisions, and creation. Fourth, in their openness, string figures also play a *regenerative and imaginative role*: being situated, they deal with risk, contingency, unpredictability, and inventive activity. Finally, string figures are a way to reconstruct genealogies and cartographies. They present «a method of tracing», inviting us to «follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns [...] in real and particular places and times»³⁷.

Many of the elements identified in the current section will be helpful in the remainder of this article. For the moment, remember the following aspects (or threads): (1) the methodology of composting as a ‘thinking-with’ and a ‘becoming-with’, a transformative process in which «the partners do not precede the knotting»³⁸, and (2) conceiving of onto-epistemic practices that reconfigure reality and form knowledges as transmissions of threads in which responsibility is involved – we are responsible for choosing which threads to pursue, toward which directions, and what stories to tell (conceptual and otherwise). As we will see, a (meta)philosophical conception’s concreteness largely pertains to such responsibility and non-neutrality. «It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with»³⁹, and the same principle applies to metaphilosophy: it matters what (meta)philosophies we use to think philosophies.

3. *Concreteness: A Hegelian Inspiration*

One thread I wish to discuss is a Hegel-inspired concept of the *concrete*. I want to emphasize this *inspirational* aspect. Hegel justifies his understanding of the concrete in his system and

³⁶ See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibidem*. I will focus on cartographies and genealogies in section 7.1.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 13.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 12. Here Haraway picks up on a thought by M. Strathern, *Reproducing the Future*, Manchester (UK), Manchester University Press, 1992, p. 10.

conception of rationality. This article does not necessarily adopt this understanding (and Hegel's work appears in this text only fleetingly). However, Hegel provides interesting points from which to elaborate an *operational* notion of concreteness, which can be extended and re-signified in non-Hegelian contexts.

Hegel's view of concreteness and abstractness inverts the way they are commonly understood. Moreover, he closely relates both notions to actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) or reality (*Realität*) and effectiveness. In Hegel's view, finite empirical things are 'abstract' in that they are neither self-subsistent, or grounded in themselves, nor self-explanatory. In contrast, rationality's self-development in its determinations (i.e., the idea as the realized concept) is concrete and properly deserves the name 'actuality' (and the name 'truth')⁴⁰.

Hegel's account of *concreteness* adheres to the word's etymological meaning: concrete is «what constitutes and manifests itself through the *concrescere* of its determinations»⁴¹. Concreteness forms a negative (in a Hegelian sense, particularly a self-reflecting and self-differentiating) unity so that its moments «cannot be detached from one another» and each «can be immediately grasped only on the basis of and with the others»⁴².

In line with this picture, philosophy itself is concrete, its object being rationality's self-development – that is, a *transformative, dynamic process* in which rational determinations interrelate in complex, non-linear ways⁴³. The exposition of such development (namely, of the processual 'intricacy' of these rational relations and the determinations that emerge) is also supposed to account for things' logical or rational structure⁴⁴. This accounting for logical

⁴⁰ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, § 6 and the Remark to § 6.

⁴¹ P. Giuspoli, *Idealismo e concretezza. Il paradigma epistemico hegeliano*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2013, p. 14.

⁴² Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, § 164.

⁴³ See F. Chiereghin, *Rileggere la Scienza della logica di Hegel. Ricorsività, retroazioni, ologrammi*, Roma, Carocci, 2011; A. Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2018.

⁴⁴ See Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, Additions to § 24 and § 213.

structure is a crucial aspect: the development of rational relations and their transformation and combination (or recombination) is what accounts for – or explains – finite things. The realized concept's (the idea's) *concreteness* refers, therefore, to a self-organizing system of rational relations, which both constitutes reality and makes reality intelligible.

Some specific threads have emerged so far: the intrinsically *relational* constitution of what is concrete, its *complexity*, its *processual, transformative* character, and its higher *explanatory power*. To this list, I add a further element: what is concrete is *wirklich*, what *produces effects* (in the sense of the German verb *wirken*), and what brings something to realization. I will combine these aspects to form a notion of concreteness that, I think, can also be transferred to the contemporary positions I will address below. I also believe this paradigm of concreteness could overturn a certain kind of accusation of 'abstractness' leveled against philosophy.

I will not dwell here on the variety of meanings that this term, *abstractness*, takes on in Hegel's theorizing. I will merely point to abstraction's aspect as an activity of separation and analysis that helps develop rationality's concreteness but cannot be considered absolute. Neither abstraction as an activity nor abstractions as the results of this activity can be absolute and definitive. These results especially cannot be definitive because they are unrelated and, therefore, lack an explanatory potential to render complexity; instead, their complexity derives from the relational network into which they are inserted. Therefore, what is obtained through abstraction must be reinserted (and re-signified) into a network of relationships⁴⁵.

4. *Contemporary Metaphilosophy and the Critique of Philosophy's Abstractness*

Let us return to the criticism of abstraction leveled at philosophy. Contemporary metaphilosophy has engaged seriously with this critique, evaluating whether it reveals a half-truth. Among the factors identified to have possibly fueled philosophy's prejudice as

⁴⁵ On this topic, see, for example, L. Illetterati, *La filosofia come esperienza del pensiero e scienza della libertà*, Padova, CLEUP, 2009, pp. 10-14.

(bad) abstraction are the field's increasing professionalization and specialization and its excessive speculation associated with formal, sophisticated jargon.

Professionalization and specialization are seen as two fairly recent tendencies in philosophy that have led publications and tiny subtopics of inquiry to multiply (this trend may have also resulted from academic policies assessing scholars' research on the basis of quantitative and quantifiable criteria)⁴⁶. A risk associated with such phenomena is philosophy's fall into unintelligible language and technicalities, losing sight of the general framework surrounding specific and particularized inquiries⁴⁷. This decline could lead to a loss of contact with real-world problems, an inability to transfer achievements to the wider public and other disciplines, and philosophy's gradual impoverishment until it is sterile, void, tedious, and exhausted⁴⁸.

In response to the danger of philosophy's becoming «a site of intellectual jousting for a few»⁴⁹, Kitcher proposes turning the field inside-out. He suggests that, to escape the abstractness associated with hollow technicalities⁵⁰ and sterility, philosophy should overturn its priorities, shifting its research focus from so-called 'core areas' (e.g., epistemology, metaphysics, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of mind) to areas he considers peripheral to most contemporary (Anglophone) philosophers that aim to identify values. In his view, philosophy should not only favor the

⁴⁶ On philosophy's professionalization and specialization, see Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*.

⁴⁷ Kitcher addresses this particular criticism – and self-criticism – to mainstream philosophy in the Anglophone world (see Kitcher, *Philosophy Inside Out*; for a convincing critique of the concept of 'mainstream philosophy', see P. Baumann, *Philosophy Upside Down?*, «Metaphilosophy», XLIV (5), 2013, pp. 579-588).

⁴⁸ On these themes, see B. Stroud (2001), *What Is Philosophy?*, in *What Is Philosophy?*, ed. by C.P. Ragland and S. Heidt, New Haven, Yale University Press, pp. 25-46; Kitcher, *Philosophy Inside Out*; Baumann, *Philosophy Upside Down?*; Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*.

⁴⁹ P. Kitcher, *Philosophy Inside Out*, p. 250.

⁵⁰ For an interesting discussion of why specialization and hyper-specialized vocabularies are commonly granted to the sciences but not philosophy, see *ivi*, 250-251, and Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, pp. 25-28, 39-47.

knowledge-seeking axis of natural or factual knowledge; rather, it should concentrate on the value axis – namely, the exploration of values and their evolution in ethics, politics, and social practices. Epistemology and metaphysics would still play a significant role as possible tools for tackling genuine problems arising from society's historically determined contemporaneity⁵¹.

Predictably, Kitcher's outlook is controversial. Baumann has replied punctually to his fellow philosopher. Among other objections, Baumann claims that the development of refined, sophisticated language may attain more detailed and articulate understandings of problems, clarifying issues and helping their reformulation⁵². I will follow this thread. Refined conceptualization and language likely have greater explanatory power than non-specific terminology, thus being more 'concrete'. Moreover, forging concepts and words requires a combination of creativity and rigor that subjects knowledge production to critical transformative processes.

Two other threads interest me that are latent in Kitcher's (and other authors') account of philosophy. First, metaphilosophy – especially its normative dimension – often becomes a matter of *priorities*. The conception of what should be philosophy's main task affects the conception of what kind of philosophical inquiry should be considered *first philosophy* and ascribed central importance. By *first philosophy*, I mean 'the most important branch or activity of philosophy', which is more valuable than and should have priority over other philosophical branches or activities⁵³. Establishing what

⁵¹ For Kitcher, «At each stage, the philosopher's first task is to recognize the appropriate questions that arise for his contemporaries» (*Philosophy Inside Out*, p. 252).

⁵² See Baumann, *Philosophy Upside Down?*, p. 583.

⁵³ This definition is based on recognizing philosophy's development into multiple branches doing diverse activities. The most extreme and polarized version of this definition would present *first philosophy* as the only possible philosophy by singling out just one branch or activity that properly constitutes *philosophy*. To some extent, earlier attempts in linguistic philosophy (broadly understood) can be viewed as representing this strand. For example, Morris Lazerowitz, a student of Wittgenstein, identified *philosophy* with (just) conceptual analysis (see W.L.

first philosophy should constitute involves the at least somewhat implicit establishment of a hierarchy. Without a periphery, a center cannot exist.

Second, Kitcher's discourse employs a (metaphilosophical) tendency to regard certain areas of philosophy (such as ethics, political philosophy, and practical philosophy) as more relevant to real-world problems because they are better suited to addressing issues that arise in the present. As I see it, this idea maintains a background distinction between *theory* and *praxis*, suggesting that praxis involves real life (an almost mythical real life) while theory gradually moves from real life to abstraction. But what if we could recognize the radical concreteness of all (philosophical) theorizing, independently from the subject of inquiry? At this level, composting both these threads (or metaphilosophical stories) with feminist philosophical perspectives can make a difference.

5. *The Concreteness of Metaphilosophy: How Assumptions and Priorities Produce Real Consequences*

Metaphilosophy is a philosophical manifesto. 'Tell me what your assumptions are, and I'll tell you what a (meta)philosopher you are'. This saying emphasizes a basic but not always explicit fact: how one conceives of philosophy and its task is based on certain *assumptions* about what philosophy's nature and mission should be. A stance on these issues also affects how one thinks philosophy should be done – that is, what *method* (or methods) it should adopt. Rorty makes this point adamantly in his introduction to *The Linguistic Turn*. He argues that philosophical positions or programs inevitably presuppose certain «substantive theses»⁵⁴ about

Reese, *Morris Lazerowitz and Metaphilosophy*, «Metaphilosophy», XXI (1-2), 1990, pp. 28-42).

⁵⁴ See R.M. Rorty, *Introduction: Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy*, in *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method (With two Retrospective Essays)*, ed. by Id., Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 1-39, p. 1. In this regard, I am deeply convinced that even the most 'deflationary' conceptions of philosophy (quietism, for example) remain pervaded by substantial assumptions about the task and nature of philosophy. As I argued in G. Miolli,

what philosophy is or should be and that such assumptions guide how philosophy is conducted⁵⁵. A more straightforward way to put this assertion is «any piece of philosophizing has metaphilosophical implications»⁵⁶. This observation is not marginal. It amounts to affirming that every philosophical theorizing is, at the same time, metaphilosophical, presupposing, expressing, or embodying a conception of philosophy and its tasks.

One crucial point here is that assumptions (however implicit) about what philosophy is or should be run the risk of becoming assumptions about what *first philosophy* (or even the only philosophy) should be⁵⁷. Such an approach sets up a *hierarchical* structure that inevitably speaks of a *center* and *periphery*. This practice is tricky and never neutral. It produces not only disciplinary hierarchies but also hierarchies between people.

In her article *Word to the Wise: Notes on a Black Feminist Metaphilosophy*, Kristie Dotson examines three kinds of metaphilosophical assumptions, of which I will only consider the *fundamentality* assumption here. Dotson explores the relationship between «‘race-only’ inquiries» and «‘race-and’ inquiries»⁵⁸, but her analysis can be extended to the relationship among various branches of philosophy or among different topics that philosophy investigates. The generalized form of this assumption holds that some specific «inquiries are more conceptually basic and, by virtue of being more basic, more central»⁵⁹ than other inquiries. As a consequence of this separation between areas, research may also overlook the intersections between so-called central and marginal

Hegel e metafilosofia: mappa di un problema, «Verifiche», XLVI (1), 2017, pp. 83-128, I see the justifications of metaphilosophical assumptions as part of the work that a philosophy based on the corresponding metaphilosophy should do.

⁵⁵ See Rorty, *Introduction*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ An example is metaphilosophical naturalism (see Joll, *Metaphilosophy*, section e.). Such a position sees first philosophy as an endeavor in continuity with the natural sciences and their methods, relegating ethics or political philosophy to second place.

⁵⁸ Dotson, *Word to the Wise*, p. 70.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 70.

investigations. Here, I use *intersection* in a strong sense to mean the space in which these fields of inquiry co-constitute each other. When I refer to *the intersection between disciplines* (or *between a discipline's subbranches*), I have in mind something very close to (a) the category of intersectionality employed in feminist analyses and (b) Haraway's notion of sympoietic practices. (a) The intersection between disciplines represents a complex space that combines different quasi-individual factors that can be more adequately understood if they are analyzed according to their *relationship* and *interplay* with the other factors because (b) the relationships between quasi-individual factors are more explanatory than such factors abstracted from their relational context. In a space of sympoietic interaction, factors shape one another – they 'become-with' each other.

I return now to Kitcher's proposal. Thinking in terms of a separation (however flexible and permeable) between investigations on the knowledge-seeking axis and inquiries concerned with the value axis hides⁶⁰ the intersectional space where they shape one another. Consequences of the fundamentality assumption, therefore, are «separating single and complex inquiries into different discourses», «establishing a single inquiry as more fundamental», and «elevating that single inquiry»⁶¹.

We are approaching an aspect of philosophy's (and metaphilosophy's) concreteness:

the fundamentality assumption establishes weighted values among similar, though different kinds of discourses. These weighted values create skewed scales of measurement that, may look innocent, but have real consequences⁶².

The reference to real consequences is a crucial point. It helps illuminate the concrete dimension of (meta)philosophical theorizing

⁶⁰ Dotson talks of «theoretical shortsightedness» (*Word to the Wise*, p. 72).

⁶¹ Ivi, p. 71.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

(regardless of the topic or branch considered) with respect to the production of material effects within social and epistemic relations.

6. *The Concreteness of Philosophical (and Metaphilosophical) Theorizing*

In her article *Theory as Liberatory Practice* (1991), bell hooks helps us dive into the ‘real consequences’ of theorizing. Though no longer recent, that essay remains extremely topical.

I would summarize hooks’s text with these words: theory is never *just* theory but *the way (or ways) we do it*. Feminist epistemologies have clarified that theory is (also) a matter of practices. Such practices have *effects* and *affect* the reconfiguration of the material, relational conditions of our lives and societies.

The real consequences of theorizing comprise both transformative, liberating processes and oppressive practices. bell hooks describes her approach to theory as motivated by the pain she felt from sexist and racist discrimination. In her experience, theory became a «location for healing», a place to understand, question, and change the status quo, imagining «possible futures»⁶³ and ways to live differently. The concreteness of theorizing manifests in its therapeutic effects and potential for collective emancipation. It can influence and change people’s lives, exerting an explanatory function that itself has liberating consequences. However, theory’s concreteness also concerns other aspects: its implementation, use (or uses), and material implications, the latter of which I understand here as the configuration and establishment of *systems of relations* that instantiate inclusion-exclusion dynamics, hierarchies, and asymmetrical relationships.

Theorizing always involves its own cutting and selecting, including and excluding arguments, as well as distinct procedures or methods, criteria for its validity, assumptions, and ways to formulate criteria and presuppose assumptions. All of these factors are active and interrelated during theorizing, and they help create systems of relations *between concepts*. How thoughts and concepts are

⁶³ bell hooks, *Theory as Liberatory Practice*, respectively p. 1 and p. 2.

connected or separated, included or excluded, and opposed or joined matters – and what these conjunctions or separations lead us to think also matters⁶⁴.

Moreover, theorizing generates *systems of relations* between people – between communities. bell hooks points to an instrumental use of theory, through which practices of domination and subjugation are reinforced. The purpose of this use of theory is «to divide, separate, exclude, keep at a distance»⁶⁵. Interestingly, this use intersects with concerns about philosophy's abstractness addressed by contemporary metaphilosophy. The technical, hyper-specialized, self-referential vocabulary that theorizing produces and employs can, indeed, become an instrument of domination and separation:

It is evident that one of the many uses of theory in academic locations is in the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references that may not be at all clear or explained⁶⁶.

Theory can occur through a series of exclusionary practices in which technical language aims not at a better understanding of the investigated subject but, rather, a display of erudition or the emphasis of one's own elevated position with respect to an audience. The more inadequate this audience feels, the more it will confirm the speaker's superiority. Unsurprisingly, non-philosophical practitioners outside the academic environment might find these performances «useless» and «a kind of narcissistic self-indulgent practice»⁶⁷.

⁶⁴ For example, thinking of evolution in terms of collaborative relationships (such as sympoiesis, symbiosis, and endosymbiosis) differs from thinking of evolution (just) in terms of competing dynamics. These two views also lead to very different conclusions in terms of political and social theories. Taking on sympoietic practices, for example, encourages thinking about multispecies justice and kinships.

⁶⁵ bell hooks, *Theory as Liberatory Practice*, p. 5.

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Ivi, pp. 4-5.

This way of practicing theory (that produces hierarchies, as well as feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, and that adopts obscure terms, intending to show off, rather than making oneself understood) also helps validate and legitimate an idea that theory *must* be extremely abstract, elitist, hermetic, and hardly intelligible. This idea has real consequences: it defines criteria and strict standards to legitimize «what is theoretical and what is not»⁶⁸. This way of practicing theory «set[s] up unnecessary and competing hierarchies of thought which reinscribe the politics of domination by designating some work inferior, superior, more or less worthy of attention»⁶⁹. Hierarchies of thought intersect with hierarchies between people and vice versa. Theorizing institutes systems of relations among concepts, knowledges, disciplines, and people.

In light of bell hooks's reflections, the theoretical issue concerning technical language is composted with an issue about this language's (social, political, and material) function. How do philosophers use specialized and technical jargon? Does it play an emancipatory role or an oppressive role? As we have seen, the refinement of sophisticated languages is not bad in itself⁷⁰; it can reveal new possibilities and horizons. However, importantly, it is clearly not a neutral practice. How we conceive of philosophical theorizing, as well as its instruments and uses (i.e., our metaphilosophical conception), has real consequences. Recognizing this impact is a useful starting point for doing (good) philosophy (and metaphilosophy).

7. *Combining Critique with Imagination as a Philosophical Methodology*

Since the modern era, methodology has become something of an obsession for philosophy. Method «has played a role whenever

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ It can be added here that any vocabulary can potentially sound 'abstract', including the language of composting or string figures. In order to display the concreteness of a technical jargon, one should give an account of the relational, epistemic and ontological context in which it operates, also indicating the transformative processes it makes possible, as well as its material implications.

a guarantee of validity for our knowledge has been sought, whether it was the mode of knowing or, instead, the objects⁷¹. In the background is the confrontation between philosophy and the sciences with their legitimation as reliable forms of knowledge⁷². The history of philosophy presents countless attempts to turn philosophy into a science, usually by adopting new methodologies⁷³.

Contemporary metaphilosophy is no exception to this obsession with method, as the conviction that a reflection on *how* philosophy should be done is essential for doing (good) philosophy shows⁷⁴. The point is made that progress in philosophy significantly intertwines with scrutiny and the improvement of methodologies and their performances. The idea of this improvement often comes with specific aspects and notions. Method is associated with a vocabulary that relates to discipline, rigor, the refinement of «accepted standards of philosophical discussions», «patience», and «collective hard work»⁷⁵. The idea is to move toward higher standards of philosophical reasoning, achieving broader agreement within philosophical communities.

To complicate things, another aspect should be introduced concerning the (methodological) confrontation between philosophy and the sciences. *Experimental philosophy* has recently emerged as a branch of philosophy distinct from *armchair philosophy* (that is, from a philosophy whose methods and procedures can be unfolded while sitting in an armchair). Experimental philosophers

⁷¹ G. Giordano, *Metodo*, in *Le parole e i numeri della filosofia*, ed. by S. Achella and C. Cantillo, Roma, Carocci, 2020, pp. 150-156, p. 150; my translation.

⁷² For an efficacious overview of different positions on the relationship between philosophy and science, see S. Overgaard, P. Gilbert and S. Burwood, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, pp. 24-69.

⁷³ See Rorty, *Introduction*, p. 1.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, p. 17. For a critical overview of the methodologies employed in philosophy, see G. D'Oro and S. Overgaard (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, p. 8; Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, pp. 29-30; N. Rescher, *Metaphilosophy: Philosophy in Philosophical Perspective*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014, p. 1, pp. 29-37.

maintain that philosophical arguments and intuitions – especially in the fields of philosophy of mind and moral philosophy – should be tested empirically, by using experimental data and «scientific methods, mostly taken from psychology and the social sciences»⁷⁶.

Though not explicitly excluded, metaphilosophical theorization (whether in its armchair or experimental version) does not commonly connect method with joy, imagination, visionary tendencies, or «critical and joyful fuss»⁷⁷. By contrast, these elements are decisive in feminist theorization⁷⁸. Drawing attention to such aspects and their functions represents a way that feminist thought can refresh the philosophical reflection on method and trigger new methodological transformations, creating a space for new composting.

The discussion of the role of imagination – which is understood as an artistic-creative capacity regarding the formulation of new hypotheses, concepts, notions, and paradigms – also features in the contemporary metaphilosophical debate. Interestingly, conceptual creativity emerges, for example, as a common trait of philosophy and science, especially concerning reasoning that operates with indeterminate concepts (in the style of Kantian reflective judgments). Here, imagination works within an «open-textured rationality»⁷⁹. Paolo Parrini, for instance, attributes particular significance to such an «extended or liberalized rationality» during phases when global changes that are «so radical as to merit the

⁷⁶ See J. Horvath and T. Grundmann (eds.), *Experimental Philosophy and Its Critics*, London-New York, Routledge, 2012, p. 1; see also J. Knobe and S. Nichols (eds.), *Experimental Philosophy*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2008; and Id. (eds.), *Experimental Philosophy: Volume 2*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁷⁷ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ See J. Kelly, *The Double-edged Vision of Feminist Theory*, «Feminist Studies», V (1), 1979, pp. 216-227; R. Adrienne, *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2001; D.J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*, Chicago (IL), Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003; Braidotti, *Feminist Philosophy*.

⁷⁹ P. Parrini, *Fare filosofia, oggi*, Roma, Carocci, 2018, p. 38. This kind of rationality is not limited to «logical-demonstrative aspects, formal, definitional and algorithmic procedures» (ivi, p. 33; my translation).

appellation of ‘scientific revolutions’⁸⁰ are produced. The activity of extended rationality is crucial to the re-discussion of presuppositions, assumptions, and models in force – and to the search for new conceptualizations, justification procedures, and methodologies. In this regard, Parrini refers to «an ‘artistic’ capacity [...] to ‘place’ the set of elements or facts we are dealing with within a new network of reciprocal relations, putting it in a different framework»⁸¹.

While imagination, or its specification as conceptual creativity, is not overlooked by metaphilosophical reflection, this aspect receives a renewed impetus and is radicalized in the field of feminist research. The feminist contribution is, alongside a greater recognition of imaginative and creative activity, the union of imagination’s theoretical dimension with its ethical and political roles. Philosophical proposals such as those by Haraway and Braidotti⁸² emphasize and implement imagination’s liberating, transgressive, and empowering potential. Imagination becomes the first political act toward change.

To acknowledge imagination’s central role is to conceive of theory as «a mix of critique and creativity»⁸³, which also turns theory into a joyful act. The purpose of theoretical analysis is as critical as it is transformative; it «does not stop at critical deconstruction but moves on to the active production of alternatives»⁸⁴ by «mobilizing resources and visions that have been left untapped and by actualizing them in daily practices of interconnection with others»⁸⁵.

The active production of alternatives highlights an important issue: imagination is a process of empirical *experimentation*, especially

⁸⁰ Ivi, p. 39.

⁸¹ Ivi, p. 40; my translation.

⁸² A well-known reference for Braidotti’s treatment of the theme of imagination as conceptual creativity is Gilles Deleuze (together with Félix Guattari; see G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchill, London, Verso, 1994, especially pp. 1-12. See also J. Burton, *Research Problems and Methodology: Three Paradigms and a Thousand Exceptions*, in *The Continuum Companion to Continental Philosophy*, pp. 9-32.

⁸³ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 187.

⁸⁴ Ead., *Feminist Philosophy*, p. 167.

⁸⁵ Ead., *The Posthuman*, p. 191.

with the invention and testing of new practices and collective bounds. Along these lines, Braidotti defines critical posthuman theory as an «empirical project» focused on «experimentation with new subject formations»⁸⁶. What must be tested is «what we are actually capable of becoming»⁸⁷. In another example, Haraway invites to use imagination in rethinking kinship, freeing it from genealogy, consanguinity, biology, and speciesism and bringing it to the level of affections and sympoietic (multispecies) collaborations, thus considering kin-making generated through collective becoming-with⁸⁸.

Importantly, in addition to the above examples, the theorization of new models of subjectivity – as well as of new kinship relations – can only take place on the basis of experimentation. A conceptual systematization cannot stand here as *a priori* but, rather, accompanies experimentation through ‘risky’, ‘noninnocent’, and ‘promising’ attempts⁸⁹. In such attempts, creativity is at stake, together with responsibility, collective action and choices, and joy (not as naive optimism but as an empowering act, a desiring transformation)⁹⁰.

Imagination and creativity disclose «the experimental path»⁹¹, leaving room for the ‘empirical’ – not predetermined – side of theory merged with praxis and also transferring this ‘privilege’ of flexibility and openness (i.e., of self-transformative capacity) to methodology. To approach complexity, methodology must maintain plasticity.

7.1. Tracing Embodied Maps: Cartographies and Genealogies

The combination of critique and imagination can be found in the intersections of different methodological procedures. One

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 61.

⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 92.

⁸⁸ See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 102-103.

⁸⁹ The use of such adjectives permeates Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble*.

⁹⁰ See Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, pp. 103, 191.

⁹¹ Ivi, p. 39.

example is the very method of composting and sympoietic practices as it emerges from Haraway's volume *Staying with the Trouble*. Other modes include mapping relations of domination and power (in the double meaning of *potestas* and *potentia*⁹²), as well as the dynamics of forming subjectivities and knowledges. This mapping, which merges cartographic and genealogical methodologies, can be recognized as a fundamental part of critical feminist projects. In Braidotti's words:

A cartography is a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present. Cartographies aim at epistemic and ethical accountability by unveiling the power locations which structure our subject-position. As such, they account for one's locations in terms of both space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical and genealogical dimension)⁹³.

Cartographies are tools that account for situatedness, location, and embodiment, thus underscoring the responsibility and non-neutrality of epistemic and social relations.

Cartographies focus on the present. This present is not static, wedged between the past and the future in a linear path; rather, it is dynamic, a «thick present»⁹⁴. Cartographies mean to map ongoing changes and transformations. As maps of systems of relationships and power (in their constant process of reconfiguration), cartographies are tools for an *analysis of complexity* that avoid simplification or reduction to a few factors, instead aiming to capture dynamics' interplay. In this process, cartographies discard the linear, causal model of explanation in favor of non-linear analyses⁹⁵. Cartographic procedures must be «dynamic, mutant, shifting»,

⁹² See *ivi*, p. 164.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 1.

⁹⁵ For example, feminist neo-materialist approaches call for «models of causation and explanation that can account for the complex interactions through which the social, the biological, and the physical emerge, persist, and transform» (S. Frost, *The Implication of the New Materialism for Feminist Epistemology*, p. 69).

«adaptable and sensitive»⁹⁶. In this sense, cartographies are ‘open methods’, «navigational tool[s]»⁹⁷, rather than photographs, which would be outdated at the very moment when they are produced. They are not *exact* measurements but accurate «representations of our situated historical location»⁹⁸. At the same time, cartographies project beyond themselves: they are bridges – transits to informed, accountable, and inventive change.

The genealogical method goes hand in hand with the cartographic method. It serves just as well to account for the present, telling stories not told at school or in mainstream culture. The genealogical and cartographic method certainly has Foucauldian roots; at the same time, feminist research has proposed ‘integrated’ cartographies and genealogies, transformed in a critical way with respect to Foucault’s proposal⁹⁹ and deployed anti-oppressively.

Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch* is an example of a genealogical operation. She focuses on the «‘transition’ from feudalism to capitalism» to produce an «explanation of the roots of the social and economic exploitation of women»¹⁰⁰. The genealogical reconstruction led her to support the thesis first propounded by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James that individuates «the sphere of reproduction as a source of value-creation and exploitation»¹⁰¹ that has been mystified as a natural resource, rather than

⁹⁶ F. Ferrando, *Towards a Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement*, «Frame Journal for Literary Studies», 2012, pp. 9-18, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 5.

⁹⁸ Ivi, p. 4.

⁹⁹ The feminist re-signification of genealogy, for example, allows for a critique and integration of the Foucauldian interpretation of body control and biopower. For a critique that Foucault’s account of biopower ignores women’s bodies (and, therefore, lacks a ‘gynecological genealogy’), see A. Balzano, *Per farla finita con la famiglia. Dall’aborto alle parentele postumane*, Milano, Meltemi, 2021, pp. 15, 28. For a criticism that the Foucauldian analysis of bodies overlooks the processes of reproduction, treating the histories of men and women indifferently and omitting the witch-hunt as an attack on women’s bodies, see S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Brooklyn (NY), Autonomedia, 2004, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

recognized as a social-economic activity to be paid for. In the author's view, this genealogical operation – the reconstruction of a previously unspoken story (and history) – has enabled many theoretical gains¹⁰², paving the way for the development of political action promoting change.

The same political, anti-oppressive potential is characteristic of many feminist genealogies. Angela Balzano, for example, offers a genealogy of abortion's history¹⁰³. She intersects this analysis with other genealogical reconstructions concerning experimental research on contraceptive methods, their commercialization and distribution, and the formation of the heteronormative nuclear family model. Such studies set the stage for a change of course toward experimentation with new practices of self-determination and kin-making.

Thus, cartographies and genealogies present a combination of critique with creativity. Creativity emphasizes situated analyses' empowering and transforming potential. To better appreciate this generative aspect, in the next subsection, I will consider the methodological use of figurations.

7.2. Figurations as Models to Be Inhabited

Cartographies and genealogies are not abstract maps; rather, they are embodied and embedded. As such, they «work in tandem with the quest for alternative figurations or *conceptual personae*»¹⁰⁴.

Figurations, *conceptual personae*, or string figures largely populate the writing of Haraway, Braidotti, and other feminist authors. Examples include: the cyborg, the oncomouse, the FemaleMan, and the modest witness¹⁰⁵; the spider *Pimoa cthulhu* and the matsutake

¹⁰² For instance, this operation has exposed the limitations of the Marxist analysis of women's oppression (ivi, pp. 7, 11-14), allowed an understanding of housework's structural features, and «provided a genealogy of the modern concepts of femininity and masculinity» (ivi, p. 8).

¹⁰³ See Balzano, *Per farla finita con la famiglia*, pp. 25-57.

¹⁰⁴ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁵ For these figurations, see especially D.J. Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*, «Socialist Review», LXXX, 1985, pp. 65-108; Ead., *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_*

mushroom¹⁰⁶; Dolly the sheep and Rosita (the cow cloned and modified to produce milk enhanced with human proteins); the techno-caregiver Care-O-bot; Trotula (the first recognized female doctor, a gynecologist, herbalist, and midwife); the Amazon diatom¹⁰⁷; the witch¹⁰⁸; and nomadic subjects¹⁰⁹. Such figurations are not metaphors or mimesis of reality; «they are neither figural nor necessarily figurative»¹¹⁰. Instead, they are what Balzano defines as «convissuti radicati»¹¹¹ – that is, collectively lived experiences that are situated, embedded, and embodied. Figurations as lived, embodied experiences exercise the important function of avoiding the oblivion of bodies, as well as the «neutralization of point of view and universalization of contents»¹¹². Figurations anchor speculation «to subjectivities in tissues and cells, organs and fluids»¹¹³.

Figurations may be seen as cartographies ‘concentrated’ in performative, generative models. On the one hand, they are «signposts for specific geo-political and historical locations» that condense «processes of becoming»¹¹⁴. On the other hand, they boost the invention and actualization of empowering, affirmative alternatives. As active models to be inhabited, they trigger conceptual experimentation combined with new practices that affect the present. Figurations «interfere with reality, contaminate and dislocate it»¹¹⁵.

OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience, New York-London, Routledge, 1997.

¹⁰⁶ See Ead., *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 31, 37. See also A. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ As for Rosita, Trotula, Care-O-bot, the Amazon diatom, see Balzano, *Per farla finita con la famiglia*.

¹⁰⁸ See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ See Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

¹¹⁰ F. Timeto, *Dizionario per lo Chthulucene*, «Not», September 24, 2019 (<https://not.neroeditions.com/dizionario-lo-chthulucene/>; my translation).

¹¹¹ Balzano, *Per farla finita con la famiglia*, p. 12.

¹¹² *Ibidem* (my translation).

¹¹³ Ivi, p. 13 (my translation).

¹¹⁴ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ F. Timeto, *Dizionario per lo Chthulucene* (my translation). An example of how figurations interfere with our praxis is the rethinking and changing of practices

The fact that figurations operate as performative models implies that the methodology they actualize is rather a content-methodology: figurations are not formal procedures applied to contents that are to be dealt with but, rather, *embodied* and *embedded* methodologies that themselves generate original practices and contents.

7.3. Open Methodologies

The methodology of compost, the use of string figures, figurations, and conceptual characters, and the intertwining of genealogical and cartographic procedures are examples of philosophical activity's concreteness in the sense of *concrete* that I suggested at the beginning of this article.

These methods engage complexity, consider relationality as a primary source for epistemic and ontological explanations, approach (as well as perform) a *concrescere* and intersection of dynamics (which are understood in their relational complexity). Moreover, they present themselves as critical-creative methods. Not only do they yield a critique of existing conditions and ongoing processes, but they also perform imagination as the first political act of change, thus interfering with the present – that is, they have a transformative value in themselves. They produce effects, such as the invention and experimentation of new collective practices.

Meaningfully, these methodologies move away from the obsessive comparison between philosophy and science. They detach themselves from the ideal of turning philosophy into a science – «a discipline in which universally recognized decision-procedures are

that we may use towards the oncotope, a «transgenic organism created for the purposes of research» and «a mammal rescuing other mammals», used to develop a cure for breast cancer (Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 75). Just like string figures, figurations solicit responses. What kind of kinship can we form with these techno-animals? What processes of subjectivity formation are we participating in? What multispecies justice do we have to work towards? On these topics, see Balzano, *Per farla finita con la famiglia*; Braidotti, *The Posthuman*; Haraway, *Modest_Witness*.

available for testing philosophical theses»¹¹⁶ – while engaging in a serious and informed dialogue with the natural and social sciences.

8. *Conclusion*

In this article, I have considered the critique of abstractness directed at philosophy, which tends to devalue philosophy in both socio-political and academic contexts. On the one hand, I confront this prejudice daily (and, therefore, experience a kind of personal urgency to refute it); on the other hand, I think it is a theoretical problem that deserves exploration. From many quarters, philosophy is accused of being detached from reality and real-world problems, of having no relevance to society and no application to everyday life. In reacting to these accusations, I have attempted to compost contemporary metaphilosophy with feminist perspectives that help articulate some crucial aspects of (meta)philosophy's concreteness.

Using the composting method involves choosing to pursue certain threads and interweaving them with others to tell conceptual stories for which one assumes responsibility. This method also takes on a paradigm of knowledge production and theory-making in which relationships prevail over 'quasi-partners'. Its generative and explanatory aspect lies precisely in its experimentation with relationality.

The first thread I decided to examine is a Hegel-inspired notion of concreteness, according to which the concrete is intrinsically relational, processual, transformative, complex, effective, and more explicative than its reduction to abstract parts. This notion of concreteness combines well with positions emerging within feminist neo-materialism that emphasize complexity as a category of analysis, the relevance of transformative processes, and a material-semiotic interrelationality. I have tried to show that doing philosophy (and metaphilosophy) is concrete, according to the notion of concreteness suggested.

¹¹⁶ Rorty, *Introduction*, p. 1.

In particular, I have followed two strands of reasoning to illustrate some ways in which philosophical theory is concrete. The first strand is a focus on the material dimension of philosophical (and metaphilosophical) theory-making – that is, on the fact that this process is substantiated by acts or practices that produce real consequences. These acts, as cuts or patterns of inclusion-exclusion, coincide – for example – with the working-out of certain assumptions, presuppositions, priorities, and criteria regarding what is considered proper philosophy. All of these (metaphilosophical) aspects *do matter*. They matter because they help create systems of relationships between concepts, knowledges, and people – that is, they have effects. Another potential outcome of doing philosophical theory is individual and collective liberation. This goal is attained by making sense of the status quo and imagining change. However, philosophical theory can also become an oppressive instrument. This double dimension, which reflects the non-neutrality of philosophical theory-making, intertwines with the threads of producing technical and specialized languages. This very activity can be liberating (leading to a greater understanding and explanation of problems) but also oppressive (endorsing relations of domination between people and disciplines). In the face of this risk-taking dimension, the task of a self-aware metaphilosophical reflection is to ask itself about the responsibilities and consequences of philosophy's practices implemented to create and use new concepts and methodologies «in order to be aware of the possible consequences [...] on a political, social, cultural, ecological level»¹¹⁷. To define philosophy's mission, nature, and method is to define priorities and establish systems of relationships between concepts that intersect with systems of relationships between people.

Philosophy's concreteness also pertains to its transformative potential in approaching complexity. To highlight this aspect, I have focused on method, showing how a reflection on the critical methodologies that may be chosen to do good philosophy can be composted with a radicalization of imagination's role. The union

¹¹⁷ Ferrando, *Towards a Posthumanist Methodology*, p. 11.

of critique and imagination is at work in genealogical cartographic methods that aim to yield an adequate reading of what is happening, equally bridging toward the construction of alternatives. Through figurations and conceptual characters, a method can become not only a procedure of rational and rigorous reasoning, or a procedure to collect and interpret empirical data, but also a model to be inhabited – something that itself produces contents to be experienced.

Overall, this article is only an initial mapping of the ways through which metaphilosophical reflection and feminist philosophy might enter into a process of mutual composting. Haraway's compostist-sympoietic materialism and Braidotti's critical posthumanism wager on what we can become. One might wonder at this point: What can we become through the composting of metaphilosophy with feminism? In order to answer this question, new string figures must be woven. They should tell a conceptual story that explores the following aspects: the responsibility of metaphilosophical positioning; the explicit revelation of theoretical priorities, as well as of the use of theory and the role of specialized lexicons; the reformulation of paradigms of concreteness and abstraction, together with a survey of their material implications and social reception; a new exploration of the ways through which philosophy can be 'experimental'; and a radicalization of critical imagination as a methodological tool for the production of alternatives that make a difference. These aspects enhance philosophy's experimental dimension, removing the field's aura of immobility represented by statues of absorbed figures who rest their chin on one hand.