

# FEMINIST METAPHORS AND PHILOSOPHY

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## ABSTRACT

In this study the author is concerned with the relation between philosophy and metaphors, and on the contribution of feminist philosophy to the ongoing discussion about the status of metaphors in philosophical discourse. She gives a concise discussion of the authors who are responsible for the current understanding of relationships of metaphor and philosophy. The main part of the study is made up of an analysis of the views of feminist philosophers on the role of metaphor in the philosophical texts of the classic authors, especially the metaphors of maleness and femaleness (G. Lloyd, E.F. Kittay, M. Le Doeuff), and on the possibility of their reinterpretation. As an example of attempts at the philosophical exploitation of metaphors, the author analyses the metaphor of pregnancy in J. Kristeva, the metaphor of the depth of the sea in L. Irigaray, and the metaphor of the theatrical play in E. Buker. The author regards metaphors as an inseparable part of philosophical discourse and states that active philosophical (feminist) reinterpretations of metaphors are possible.

KEY WORDS: Philosophy, feminist philosophy, metaphor, maleness, femaleness, pregnancy, depth of the sea, dramatic piece.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio trata sobre la relación entre la filosofía y las metáforas, y sobre la contribución de la filosofía feminista al debate sobre el estatus de las metáforas en el discurso filosófico. La autora propone una concisa muestra de los autores responsables de lo que se entiende hoy en día como dicha relación. La mayor parte del estudio consiste en el análisis de las posturas de las filósofas feministas sobre el papel de las metáforas en los textos filosóficos de los autores clásicos, especialmente las metáforas de la masculinidad y femineidad (G. Lloyd, E.F. Kittay, M. Le Doeuff), y la posibilidad de su reinterpretación. Como ejemplo de los intentos del uso filosófico de la metáfora, se analiza la metáfora del embarazo en J. Kristeva, la de la profundidad del mar en L. Irigaray y la de la obra teatral en E. Buker. La autora toma las metáforas como una parte inseparable del discurso filosófico y propone reinterpretaciones filosóficas feministas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Filosofía, filosofía feminista, metáfora, masculinidad, femineidad, embarazo, profundidad marina, obra dramática.



## INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, the problem of metaphor as such, and the relationship of metaphor and philosophy have occupied much philosophical thinking. Feminist philosophy joined this vivid discussion in a specific way due to the angle from which it criticizes European philosophy. Many feminist philosophers challenged the claim of philosophy to represent universal reason and neutrality of knowledge, and revealed that it is based on the suppression of «the other»; in the case of European philosophy, approximately from Plato's time, on the suppression of «woman». As a consequence of that maneuver, many philosophers explicitly or implicitly connected that so-called «universal human reason» with masculinity.

However, there is the problem of epistemological status of «woman» and «man», «femininity» and «masculinity» in philosophical argumentation. Are we speaking about the real men and women, with their characteristics as human creatures, or do we use these words as metaphors? If the latter is a case, the further question arises: what is the place of metaphor in philosophical texts in general? Are they only rhetorical devices necessary for better understanding of abstract ideas, something we can —and should— get rid of in philosophy? Or do metaphors represent an indispensable part of philosophical thinking? In this case, can they be used consciously and positively for feminist philosophical goals?

In this paper, divided into three sections, we explore 1) the general views on the functioning of metaphors in philosophy, supporting an idea of their cooperation, 2) feminist analyses of the texts of canonical philosophers, and 3) three metaphors, and their philosophical interpretation, offered by feminist thinkers with the aim to reconsider the philosophical concept of the subject.

### 1. PHILOSOPHY AND METAPHORS

We cannot separate the problem of the relationship between metaphors and philosophy from the problem of the definition of the topic and goal of philosophy itself. According to Richard Rorty, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three views on philosophy were established: philosophy as science (Husserl), as poesis (Heidegger), and as politics (pragmatism)<sup>1</sup>. The latter two approaches emerged as a reaction to the first one, criticizing it for its belief that philosophy can serve as a firm base for knowledge (foundationalism). It is understandable, as to why the first view on philosophy —as an exact knowledge— cannot accept metaphors as a part of philosophizing: they are too ambiguous, and vague. On the contrary, because it is not possible to reach any exact knowledge about reality (since reality itself, or our knowl-

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<sup>1</sup> R. RORTY, «Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics», in A. COHEN and M. DASCAL (eds.), *The Institution of Philosophy. A Discipline in Crisis?*, Illinois, Open Court, 1989, pp. 13-33.

edge about it is not exact), the latter two approaches argue that metaphors serve as very apt devices to reveal and express Being (Heidegger), or to motivate people to change their lives (Rorty).

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, metaphors began to be accepted also by scientists. It was connected with the stress on the importance of models in science, understanding them not only as explanatory, but also heuristic devices. E.F. Kittay writes, «These models must be understood as extended metaphors —not literally true, but useful representations of the phenomena which often led to fruitful theoretical conceptions and new empirical discoveries»<sup>2</sup>. Simultaneously, the Aristotelian theory of metaphor viewing metaphor as a rhetorical device appropriate in the area of poetry (literature), but not in philosophy, was challenged.

One of the first authors to elaborate a new theory of metaphor was I.A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*<sup>3</sup>. His theory was further developed and applied in the scope of philosophy of science by Max Black in *Models and Metaphors*<sup>4</sup>, becoming «probably the best known modern theory of metaphor»<sup>5</sup>. In the book, Black distinguished three main theories of metaphors: substitution, comparison, and interaction view. He rejected the first two approaches, and elaborated on the third, based on the presumption that metaphors emerge in the process of interaction between two subjects in terms of a «system of associated commonplaces». Consequently, the division between literal and metaphorical meaning of the metaphorical utterance is abandoned and according to Black, the difference between the two is relative and can be applied only in certain contexts. Metaphorical meaning cannot be reduced to the literal one, as it emerges exactly in the inter-space of two «subject's domains» as a result of the tension between them. Metaphor has cognitive content, and brings new knowledge, claims Max Black. His view on metaphor is now widely accepted and many authors continue to work on it, improving, or modifying some of its aspects (M. Hesse, E.R. MacCormac, P.K. Saha, etc.)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> E.F. KITTAY, *Metaphor. Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> I.A. RICHARDS, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. New York & London, Oxford University Press, 1936.

<sup>4</sup> M. BLACK, *Models and Metaphors. Studies in Language and Philosophy*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> P.K. SAHA, «Metaphorical style as message», in D. HELMAN (ed.), *Analogical Reasoning: Perspectives of Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, and Philosophy*, Dordrecht & Boston, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988, pp. 41-61, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Among the authors of this group, there are differences not only in their conception, but also in terminology: for example, E.R. MacCormac entitled his theory *tension theory* (see in E.R. MAC CORMAC, *Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 1976); P.K. Saha named it *relational theory*. They also differ in how they call two poles of metaphorical interaction: *tenor* and *vehicle* (I.A. Richards), *principal subject* and *subsidiary subject*, (*source domain* and *target domain*) (M. Black), *A* and *B* (G. Lakoff & M. Johnson), *Nom 1* and *Nom 2* (P.K. Saha), *primary system* and *secondary system* (see in M. HESSE, *Models and Analogies in Science*. London, Sheed and Ward, 1963). They distinguish also conventional and novel metaphor (T. Leddy), visible, faded, and invisible (P.K. Saha), live and dead metaphor (P. Ricoeur).



Because of their importance in the acceptance of metaphors in philosophy, we need to focus on at least on two contributions: experientialist theory (inspired by pragmatism) of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, and hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur.

In their famous work *Metaphors We Live by*<sup>7</sup>, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson analyzed metaphors within the framework of human experience as such, and as a means of human understanding and conceptualization of the world, and developed «the most important implications of metaphor studies for philosophy so far»<sup>8</sup>. They claim that the main function of metaphors is to understand one part of human experience in terms of the other. Criticizing both objectivism, for not taking into account that we understand the world by our interactions with it, and subjectivism undermining the conceptual significance of metaphors, they establish their own position, called experientialism, between the two. By close interpretation of many examples from our ordinary language, they persuasively documented the idea that our language is metaphorical, because it is based on analogical associations we find in our experience. They also showed that not only expressions and utterances from our ordinary language, but also our understanding of philosophical concepts (like time and being) is metaphorical; our abstract thinking being by necessity «grounded» in something we can experience, something concrete. Moreover, each metaphor makes visible only several aspects of reality, while hiding the others, therefore opening the different world-views for our thinking, and practical activities, for example the different consequences ensuing from «nature is machine» and «nature is organism». From that point of view, the philosophical texts are understood as models of the world, articulated in so-called conceptual, or root metaphors<sup>9</sup>.

P. Ricoeur in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* agrees with the theory of Max Black, adding that «what we have just called the tension in a metaphorical utterance is really not something that occurs between two terms in the utterance, but rather between two opposed interpretation of the utterance»<sup>10</sup>. Due to this conflict, a metaphorical twist occurs «thanks to which the utterance begins to make sense»<sup>11</sup>. He distinguishes between live and dead metaphor where dead metaphor has already settled in our language in a way that we do not notice the inner conflict, understanding it without any effort. Only live metaphor is the metaphor in a proper sense —its meaning cannot be articulated otherwise since «there are no live metaphors in a dictionary»<sup>12</sup>. In his other work, *The Rule of Meta-*

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<sup>7</sup> G. LAKOFF and M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> T. LEDDY, «Metaphors and Metaphysics». *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, vol. 10, n. 3 (1995), 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Issue: Metaphor and Philosophy, pp. 205-222, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, R.H. BROWN, *A Poetic for Sociology: Toward a Logic of Discovery for the Human Sciences*. Cambridge & London, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> P. RICOEUR, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, Texas, The Texas Christian University Press, 1976, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.



phor: *Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*<sup>13</sup>, metaphor becomes the central problem of hermeneutics, a model of hermeneutical interpretation of the world. Here, Ricoeur re-interprets Aristotle's phrase about the «master of metaphor» by applying it not only to literature, but also to philosophy. Aristotle claimed that literature does not take interest in what really happened, but what is possible to happen. The same applies to the philosopher, according to Ricoeur, as he interprets the world in a similar way, opening the new projects and possibilities of our being in the world. To become a «master of metaphor» is the best that can happen not only to a writer, but also to a philosopher since good metaphor implies intuitive discovery of the similarity in difference, and produces new meanings.

What metaphors can we find in the history of philosophy? P. Thagard and C. Beam<sup>14</sup> analyzed several of them, especially from an area of epistemology. They started with such an obvious philosophical term as «foundationalism», showing that it is in fact metaphor based on analogy of foundation of building and theory<sup>15</sup>. We can list other metaphors, for example Descartes' metaphor of the basket full of apples, for separation of the sound and certain knowledge from the rotted and uncertain one, and chain of reasoning, the critical point of chain being its weakest one, analogical to uncertain knowledge. G.W. Leibniz uses the well-known metaphor of the veins in marble as an analogy to rational principles in the brain, while J. Lock offers the metaphor of the white paper as an analogy to reason. F. Bacon, criticizing both approaches to knowing, calls rationalists spiders since they make cobwebs out of their own substance, and empiricists ants since they only collect and use. He himself would joint bees, since they gather material but transform it into honey. There are many other metaphors explained, but the most important is the conclusion. P. Thagard and C. Beam drew from them. According to their findings, «In epistemology, however, there is not much empirical evidence directly relevant to the assessment of theories of knowledge, so that metaphors and analogies carry much more of the evaluative burden than occurs in science. Because it is not clear just what foundational and coherentist theories are supposed to explain, much of their plausibility comes from the intuitive appeal of the competing metaphors»<sup>16</sup>. As Czech philosopher Z. Neubauer explains, the importance of metaphors for phi-

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<sup>13</sup> P. RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Trans. R. Czerny with K. McLaughlin and J. Costello, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> P. THAGARD and C. BEAM, «Epistemological metaphors and the nature of Philosophy». *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 35, n. 4 (2004), pp. 504-516.

<sup>15</sup> We are now speaking of a specific usage of one word as a metaphor. As P.K. Saha explains: «In ordinary conversations as well as in formal discussions, people often talk about an item such a golden bowl or a tree or bird as being a metaphor. Technically speaking, a single item by itself can never be a metaphor. Usually the intended meaning in such cases is that the item serves as Nom 2 in a metaphor» (P.K. SAHA, «Metaphorical style as message», p. 46.)

<sup>16</sup> P. THAGARD and C. BEAM, «Epistemological metaphors and the nature of Philosophy», p. 514.

losophy results in the fact that philosophy is caring for the notions. Notions «are characteristic by being the means of thinking, and simultaneously —or *ipso facto*?— of imagining»<sup>17</sup>. «The notion itself is not an idea, not an image. It is a kind of knowing, possible of both», writes Neubauer<sup>18</sup>. When describing imagination, he says: «imagination always points behind the given horizon, it does not pay attention to limits, it opens possibility for shapes to emerge from in-finiteness (*a-peiron*)»<sup>19</sup>. Imagination comes first, creating «the soft united scene», into which the reason can mark borders, differences, relations, etc. Philosophical notion is not a piece of knowledge as in science, but not fiction either as in poesies. It is an understanding of sense, and being as such, it includes both soft work of imagination, and sharp work of reason. Imagination is connected to metaphors, as metaphor «transfers the meaning on the base of similarity. Similarity, however, represents relation —relation of similarity»<sup>20</sup>, which «cannot be determined categorically; it can be only intuitively grasped, experienced, felt on myself, in myself, as my own similarity»<sup>21</sup>. Neubauer's conception offers arguments for organic cooperation of imagination and reasoning within the realm of philosophy, explaining them as a deep and indispensable need of philosophy itself.

## 2. MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

The seminal work, which not only documents the connection of reason and masculinity in European philosophy, but also suggests that categories of femininity and masculinity used in philosophy are ambiguous in terms of their literal or metaphorical meaning, is the book by Genevieve Lloyd *The Man of Reason. «Male» and «Female» in Western Philosophy*<sup>22</sup>. The author analyzes the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Filo of Alexandria, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bacon, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and their strategies, which they used to connect reason and non-reason (reason and nature, reason and emotion, public and private, transcendence and immanence, etc.) with «male» and «female». Lloyd proclaims this tradition in Western philosophy to be so persistent that it appeared even in the texts where it went against the principles of a particular philosopher, Augustine's claim that reason does not have any sex, or Hume, who preferred emotions. However, through intermediary connections between other notions, they all came

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<sup>17</sup> Z. NEUBAUER, *O Snihurce aneb cesta za smyslem bytí a poznání*. Praha, Malvern, 2004, p. 201.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 205.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 235.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

<sup>22</sup> G. LLOYD, *The Man of Reason. «Male» and «Female» in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.



to the statement of inferior status of «female» in the process of knowing and moral reasoning. Even in consideration of Simone de Beauvoir, the severe critique of the status of women as the «second sex», Lloyd finds connection to masculinist ideals of reason and transcendence. The author offers the following explanation: «The obstacles to female cultivation of Reason spring to a large extent from the fact that our ideals of Reason have historically incorporated an exclusion of the feminine, and that femininity itself has been partly constituted through such processes of exclusion»<sup>23</sup>. For that reason, it is not easy to incorporate «woman» into the cultural ideal, constructed in, and by the opposition to her. Lloyd also stresses that «male-female distinction itself has operated not as a straightforward descriptive principle of classification, but as an expression of value»<sup>24</sup>. However, Lloyd was not clear enough in using the above-mentioned categories, and therefore her book was criticized for the slippage between categories of sex and gender, and a literal metaphorical usage of the terms «male» and «female». Lloyd answered to this critique about ten years later in her article «Maleness, metaphor, and the 'crisis' of reason»<sup>25</sup>. Here, she claims: «Both sets of distinction [sex and gender, literal and metaphorical meaning] are unstable»<sup>26</sup>. She accepts M. Black's interaction theory of metaphor, and agrees with P. Thagard and C. Beams that we should not take metaphors in philosophy as something inappropriate and leading us away from true philosophical thinking. On the contrary, she invites us to understand the relation of reason and maleness she had found in texts of many canonical figures from the history of philosophy «by trying to get a deeper understanding of how metaphor operates»<sup>27</sup>. According to her, «To grasp the contingency of philosophical metaphor is often to gain insight into philosophical content, even where this does not bring any clear idea of how we might think differently»<sup>28</sup>.

Another important contribution to the analyses of the relation of metaphor and philosophy is the paper written by Eva Feder Kittay «Woman as metaphor»<sup>29</sup>. Kittay selected the examples from philosophical texts, when «woman», or any activity associated with her, was used as metaphorical «vehicle» (terminology of I.A. Richards) to describe something else. Kittay reminds us of Socrates/Plato using the metaphor of the midwife for philosophical thinking, of F. Nietzsche calling truth a «woman», of J. Locke identifying eloquence with «woman», and F. Bacon making analogy between man sexually conquering woman and nature being conquered by reason. She follows G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, claiming that our conceptualization

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, «Introduction», p. x.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> G. LLOYD, «Maleness, metaphor, and the 'crisis' of reason», in D. TIETJENS MEYERS (ed.), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 287-301.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 288.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>29</sup> E.F. KITTAY, «Woman as metaphor», in D. TIETJENS MEYERS (ed.), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, pp. 265-285.

of the experience depends on metaphors, and reasons that if this claim is true, «we can expect that the articulation of men's experience, in large measure, will be modelled on their relationship to women»<sup>30</sup>. Kittay goes even further stating that between metaphor and woman there is a deep structural analogy. Similar to the metaphor mediating the relation between two different areas, woman mediates the man's relationship to himself, to the world, and to other men (being his Other)<sup>31</sup>. That is the reason, according to Kittay, which «makes the metaphorical use of Woman a central feature in man's conceptualization of his cosmos»<sup>32</sup>. This is also the reason for which «The study of the persistent use of woman's domain as the vehicle, where the domain of man is the topic, is then a philosophical investigation, spurred by feminist theorizing, into the nature and source of some of our most significant conceptions»<sup>33</sup>. With this connection, Kittay also asks an important question as to why the metaphorical use of woman is not reciprocal with that of man. Is that is why we can find only few metaphors when «man» is used as a vehicle for woman's attitude toward the world? Following the theory of Nancy Chodorow<sup>34</sup>, Kittay explains that it is due to the lesser importance of the Other for women, resulting, according to Chodorow, from the different son's and daughter's relation to the mother. While the son has to distance himself from the mother, and take her as his Other, to acclaim his gender identity, the daughter does not necessarily have to do that since she should adopt the same gender identity as her mother. Kittay explains an ambiguity of the mother symbol and positive and negative values that she can obtain by her omnipotent power over the child while representing safety but also punishment. At the end, the author asks the provocative question: what will happen with «woman» as metaphorical vehicle in a case, when real women in the course of their emancipation will lose specific areas of their activities (even giving birth)?

In 1989, the book written by Michèle Le Doeuff *The Philosophical Imaginary* was published<sup>35</sup>. This book empowered analyses of metaphorical and imaginative aspects of philosophy undertaken by feminist philosophers, because it offered not only philosophical arguments for the unity of rational thinking and imagination, but also revealed the reasons for the fact that metaphor of femininity was so deeply rooted in philosophers' minds. Le Doeuff differentiates between images (metaphors) to be found in philosophy, and philosophical imagination. An analysis of the philosophical imagination should focus on the points of tension in the text, not visible for the author himself, which indicate the problems inherent to philosophy

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 266.

<sup>31</sup> Kittay uses analogy to be found in English between Mother and Other = Mother/Other.

<sup>32</sup> E.F. KITTAY, «Woman as metaphor», p. 267.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> N. CHODOROW, *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley, University of Carolina Press, 1978.

<sup>35</sup> M. LE DOEUFF, *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. by C. Gordon. London, Athlone Press, 1989.



as a rational discourse: when philosophy distanced itself from the mythological approach, it suppressed its own other, an imagination. Imagination in philosophy works in two ways: it helps the text to convey its meaning, which cannot be passed by using concepts, but it works also against the text, as the witness of its impotence, and as the representation of «the other» of philosophy. According to Le Doeuff, however, «Each panel needs the other to express its own meaning»<sup>36</sup>. It is precisely this philosophy's suppressed Otherness, which is imagined as femininity. For Le Doeuff, this symbolic femininity represents everything philosophy cannot absorb, and «the nameless, undefined object, this indeterminable otherness, can only be described metaphorically»<sup>37</sup>. Femininity thus symbolically demonstrates an indispensable incompleteness and insufficiency of philosophical endeavor as such, the «shame» of which philosophy attempts to ascribe to woman. «For in defining itself through negation, the philosophy creates its Other: it engenders an opposite which, from now on, will play the role of the hostile principle, the more hostile because there is no question of dispensing with it. Femininity as an inner enemy? Or rather the feminine, a support and a signifier of something that, having been engendered by philosophy whilst being rejected by it, operates within it as an indispensable dead weight which cannot be dialectically absorbed»<sup>38</sup>. Because of their symbolic function, Le Doeuff thinks that real women need not bother with these images of femininity: «we are constantly being *confronted* (italics by the author) with the image, but we do not have to recognize ourselves in it»<sup>39</sup>. However, in a section of the same book, entitled «Long Hair, Short Idea» dealing with women's position in philosophy, she analyzes the impact and consequences of philosophical images of femininity on real women and their strategies of behavior<sup>40</sup>. It is because the metaphors have real power over our minds and self-recognition, their impact being stronger when unconsciously adopted.

An interpretation of the metaphors of femininity in philosophical texts is part of the feminist critique of the philosophical canon. Charlotte Witt<sup>41</sup> summed

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 116.

<sup>40</sup> To deal with the problem of impact of metaphors and symbols on real women, Foucault's theory of power could help, differentiating at least three aspects of power (power which is exercised over me, power which I exercise over somebody else, and power to resist power). We can use his presuppositions to explain the power of metaphors in the process of becoming the female subject. First, we can analyze metaphors as «negative» power traditional metaphors and images of femininity exercise over women limiting their self-image and self-understanding, constraining the scope of their activity and presenting obstacles for their full development (women as home angels, virgins, mothers, house-keepers, etc.). On the other hand, women are able to use power over others; it is also preserved in some metaphors and images of femininity (women as witches, devils, etc.). The third aspect of power is, of course, the most important for women: they can use power to resist the above mentioned images of femininity, to re-interpret and re-evaluate the traditional contents of metaphors and images, and to create the new metaphors.



up the main targets of the feminist approach to the history of philosophy, and identified several strategies that feminist historians have already adopted: 1) To discover forgotten women-philosophers in history, 2) To criticize the sexism of philosophers concentrating on: a) Their explicit misogynist characteristics, for example Aristotle: woman as imperfect man, b) Gender associations of the main philosophical categories (form-man, matter-woman), or c) The whole modern European philosophical tradition, associating reason and objectivity with masculinity. However, there is also the third possibility; to look for the congenial ideas, or inspirational methodologies in philosophical texts from history. An editor of *Feminism and History of Philosophy*, G. Lloyd claims that strategies of feminist historians of philosophy now change towards this kind of «cooperation» with the philosophers of the past<sup>42</sup>. The contributors to this book pay much attention to imaginative and stylistic aspects of the analyzed texts, being inspired by Le Doeuff. When summarizing their endeavor, Lloyd foreshadows an emergence of feminist history of philosophy, using the specific set of strategies and principles (unity of reason, emotions, and imagination, for example). In conclusion, Lloyd goes further than P. Thagard and C. Beam stating that «We shall then not only unmask inadequate and misleading imagery, but also replace it with more constructive ‘fictions’ of active philosophical imagination»<sup>43</sup>.

### 3. FEMINIST METAPHORS?

In accordance with the need for «active philosophical imagination», many contemporary feminist philosophers work with metaphors connected with women's experience or interpret the traditional associations of femininity in a new way. We will concentrate on two of them: Julia Kristeva, philosophically interpreting the metaphor of pregnancy, and Luce Irigaray, re-interpreting an association of woman with water in her metaphor of the depth of the sea. Both French philosophers, in spite of their differences, elaborate new philosophical ideas and thoughts, not only relevant for feminism, but also for philosophy in general, interpreting these metaphors.

Kristeva, when confronting the theory of Jacques Lacan, who connects an entrance of the child into the symbolic order with the paternal law, examines the role of the mother (maternal) in the production of discourse. She differentiates between the discursive symbolic and the pre-discursive semiotic order, the latter being characterized as «presymbolic economy of drives, characterizing the complex

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<sup>41</sup> Ch. WITT, «Feminist History of Philosophy». *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2000 Edition), Edward N. ZALTA (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2000/entries/feminism-femhist/>

<sup>42</sup> G. LLOYD, «Le Doeuff and History of Philosophy», in G. LLOYD (ed.), *Feminism and History of Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 27-37.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

exchanges between mother and the child prior to individuation of the subject and object»<sup>44</sup>. If taken without any further explanation, it seems that Kristeva repeats the pattern of dualistic thinking, and agrees with the repudiation of woman from the symbolic order. However, the close inspection of her theory reveals something different. Kristeva «challenges the very distinction between the prediscursive and the discursive, the precultural and the cultural»<sup>45</sup>. She shows that «these distinctions are not neutral or self-evident but are implied in operations of exclusion, power, and control over the production and interpretation of discourse. In other words, not only is the division between linguistic and nonlinguistic shifting and open to revision, but also the decision about what aspects of signification fall on one or the other side of this divide is culturally produced and rests on gender presuppositions»<sup>46</sup>. For that reason, Kristeva does not devote her attention to the system of language, but to the activities involved in the process of the emergence of meaning. She states that this process is characterized by the dialectics of systematicity of signs and transgression of drives. Using Hegel's notion of dialectic, Kristeva, however, claims that the symbolic order never overcomes the semiotic process, thus being forever open to incursion of heterogeneity, to homogeneity of the signifier. Moreover, the symbolic is not only constituted on the basis of the semiotic, but the semiotic «operates» inside the symbolic which she calls post-symbolic, represented by poetry (art). She writes: «Theory can 'situate' such processes and relations diachronically within the process of constitution of the subject because they function synchronically within the signifying process of the subject himself, *i.e.*, the subject of cogitation»<sup>47</sup>.

Contemporary presymbolic maternal *chora* (*chora* is the Greek word for space, place, localization) is, according to Kristeva, the result of intellectual, religious and cultural practices of the West. The most distinguished image of maternity in the Christian Europe is the virginal conception of Virgin Mary, the image-concept deliberately constructed by men. Kristeva concentrates on an analysis and critique of that image in her work «Stabat Mater»<sup>48</sup>. This oeuvre is an example of her methodology: Kristeva let us hear two discourses at once —linear, rational, and structured discourse we know from academic papers (with quotations, etc.), and poetic, emotional, and open discourse reflecting her personal, and even intimate experience of pregnancy, giving birth and maternity. Both of them fill the space of the page —there are two columns— however, not symmetrically: academic dis-

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<sup>44</sup> E.P. ZIAREK, «At the limits of discourse. Heterogeneity, alterity, and the maternal body in Kristeva's thought», in C. HENDRICKS and K. OLIVER (eds.), *Language and Liberation. Feminism, Philosophy, and Language*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 323-346, p. 328.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 324.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. M. Waller. New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> J. KRISTEVA, «Stabat mater», in D. TIETJENS MEYERS (ed.), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, pp. 303-319.

course conquers more space for itself, sometimes to the degree that it pushes the maternal discourse away entirely, but not the other way round. Two discourses are indeed different, but sometimes in personal parts an analytical tone appears, and the academic part becomes more emotional. Doing this, Kristeva documents two theses of her theory. First stating that maternity is not only a biological state, but also, and mainly, the result of cultural and discursive praxis of the West; however, still with the possibility to subvert it. Second, stating that space for alternative and feminist discourse about maternity can be created only after thorough examination of existing cultural representations of maternity.

However, more interesting for us is Kristeva's metaphor of pregnancy and its philosophical interpretation. Pregnancy is for her the metaphor for otherness (Other), which differs from the traditional image of «I» and «You», representing the relationship between two separate human beings. The case of pregnancy, however, demands the articulation of the relation between «I» and «Other» beyond the dichotomy of subject-object: the state of pregnancy precedes this dichotomy. She writes: «pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling of the body, separation and co-existence of the self and of an other...»<sup>49</sup>. By the metaphor of pregnancy, Kristeva overcomes the duality of sameness and alterity, as in the state of pregnancy:

[...] the alterity is neither inaccessible to me nor similar to me, but radically interrupts «my relation» to myself, to «my» body. Unlike the clear separation and non-coincidence between the signifier and the signified, the subject and the Other, the maternal body requires the thought of alterity in terms of infolding, as the imprint of the other within the same. As a site of infolding of the «other» and the «same», the maternal body renders the fundamental notions of identity and difference strikingly insufficient —these crucial philosophical categories indeed no longer «hold up»<sup>50</sup>.

The result, inferred from this metaphor, reads: each subject is disconnected in itself (each subject has its inner Other)<sup>51</sup>. She reminds us, however, that together with the re-consideration of pregnancy and maternity for the philosophical concept of the subject, we have to re-think maternity itself; we need to understand women not only as mothers, but mothers who do not abolish emotional, intellectual and professional part of their personalities. Only then, according to Kristeva, will maternity be transformed into a really creative act, something which we are still not able to imagine<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *New Maladies of the Soul*. Trans. R.M. Guberman. New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 219.

<sup>50</sup> E.P. ZIAREK, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

<sup>51</sup> Kristeva, contrary to Kittay, puts the difference between mother and other into Mother herself = M/other.

<sup>52</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *New Maladies of the Soul*, p. 219.



Another French feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray, adopted a different strategy to subvert the patriarchal symbolic order. She does not share Kristeva's hope that it is possible to criticize the patriarchal order using its own means (philosophical academic discourse), as it was exactly that discourse, which contributed to the expulsion of femininity by directing the discourse towards its unequivocal meaning. As she argues in her book *The Sex Which is not One*<sup>53</sup>, this kind of rational, transparent and unequivocal discourse does not suit women: «feminine writing» is poetic, metaphoric, multi-vocal. Irigaray herself uses «poetry and stylistic devices to create a mysterious linguistic realm in which words, like 'woman,' exceed the superficial 'meaning' of the text in which they are embedded»<sup>54</sup>. Irigaray makes an analogy, or metonymy, between female sexual organs (permanent mutual touching, self-eroticism) and women's writings, being often criticized for biological essentialism. However, it is necessary to take into account, that her use of the words «woman» and «femininity» is not the literal but the metaphorical one. Moreover, to reveal the limits of phallogocentric discourse, she uses strategy called mimesis. This strategy «uses existing differences in speech between men and women in basically mimetic fashion, taking up the feminine position as the negative of the male so as fully to expand its logic»<sup>55</sup>. Irigaray describes and uses the above-mentioned tactic of mimesis exemplary in her work *The Poverty of Psychoanalysis*. Here, she is:

[...] taking on the speech of the hysterical patient who is so disturbing to these analysts, adopting, with every sentence, a harsher and more «hysterical» tone until, toward the end, one can literally hear her sounding shrill. This method illustrates quite plainly how she uses technique as strategy, as she implies that psychoanalysts and their practice create in a (any) woman the voice of a hysteric, since every way you try to enter phallic discourse «differently» you are either repressed or charged with insanity or hysteria<sup>56</sup>.

In this manner, she hopes to broaden the contradictions of phallic speech, both in order to reveal its limits, and, hopefully, in order to clear a possible space for the emergence of a form of feminine speech that she believes may be hidden or repressed within male logic<sup>57</sup>. However, Irigaray does not attempt to create new language, but to create new cultural representations of femininity.

One of the metaphors, from which she drew the philosophical consequences, is the metaphor of the depth of the sea, elaborated in her book *Marine Lover of*

<sup>53</sup> L. IRIGARAY, *This Sex Which is Not One*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977.

<sup>54</sup> C. BAKER, «Language and the space of the feminine. Julia Kristeva a Luce Irigaray», in C. HENDRICKS and K. OLIVER (eds.), *Language and Liberation. Feminism, Philosophy, and Language*, pp. 367-392, p. 370.

<sup>55</sup> L. IRIGARAY, «The poverty of Psychoanalysis», in M. WHITFORD (ed.), *The Irigaray Reader*. Trans. D. Macey, New York, Basil Blackwell, 1991.

<sup>56</sup> C. BAKER, «Language and the space of the feminine. Julia Kristeva a Luce Irigaray», p. 381.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 384.



*Friedrich Nietzsche*<sup>58</sup>. In this book, she examines in detail the text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, addressing Nietzsche's hero with the following question: «Perched on any mountain peak, hermit, tightrope walker or bird, you never dwell in the great depths. And as a companion you never choose a sea creature. Camel, snake, eagle, and doves, monkey and ass, and...Yes. But not anything that moves in the water. Why this persistent wish for legs, or wings? And never gills?»<sup>59</sup> At the end, however, Nietzsche identifies Zarathustra with the sea, finding in it an analogy to his idea of eternal return. Thus ends someone, Irigaray says, who does not pay attention to his «other/woman» side: he falls into inverted side unconsciously. What is more important, however, is the fact, that Zarathustra's love for the sea is the love of someone, who watches the sea from a distance but not live in it. «To think of the sea from afar, to eye her from a distance, to use her to fashion his highest reveries, to weave his dreams of her, and spread his sail while remaining safe in port, that is the delirium of the sea lover»<sup>60</sup>. To avoid the necessity of «the return of the suppressed», discovered by psychoanalyses, Irigaray advises, not only to Nietzsche: «So remember the liquid ground», «Learn to swim»<sup>61</sup>, and «explore the bottom of the sea»<sup>62</sup>.

What is the philosophical testimony of Irigaray's image of the depths of the sea, associated with the feminine? This image can offer us the different notion of the self; notion, which underlines her flexibility, ever-changing character, process of becoming and multiplicity. Irigaray writes: «I do not wish to be measured drop by drop. Drop by drop (I) do not care to live my time. For whole and entire (I) want myself at every instant... And thus (I) come and go, change and stay, go and come, without any circle. Speak out and open in this endless becoming»<sup>63</sup>. She wishes to become «the passage between 'I' and 'You'»<sup>64</sup>. Living in the depths of the sea means to let «different bodies be and their fortune multiply»<sup>65</sup>, and to learn how to join others in the difference of their movements, which «are not distinct». Which is not to say that they are «indistinguishable»<sup>66</sup>. However, in the depths of the sea, we can hardly distinguish the depths and the surface, «her depths peel off into innumerable thin, shining layer...And these surfaces are equally deep and superficial»<sup>67</sup>. For Irigaray, woman cannot serve as a mirror, the traditional metaphor of woman, since the sea (feminine) is «too restless to be a true mirror»<sup>68</sup>. She also points out the enormously

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<sup>58</sup> L. IRIGARAY, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

rich and diverse life under the sea surface, concluding: «Life beneath the sea is not fed upon honey even. Its own elements suffice it»<sup>69</sup>.

Kristeva and Irigaray differ in their philosophical views, as Irigaray stresses the difference of the two sexes, and Kristeva put the difference into each subject, regardless of sex or gender characteristics. However, they are both persuaded that traditional patriarchal metaphors of femininity contributed to the inferior position of real women, and in order to change that, new metaphors should be introduced (Kristeva), or the old ones (archetypal association of woman and water) should be re-interpreted (Irigaray). Both are also aware of the fact that to break through existing representations of femininity is a real problem, because women have at their disposal only the language, which itself is a result of the patriarchal order. Though the strategies for transformation of the symbolic order of Kristeva and Irigaray are different, they both search for metaphors, which are not only based on women's experience, but can also bring new possibilities for both genders (and their relationship).

American feminist philosophers, especially postmodernists, use the different metaphors. Their view on gender identity to be constructed socially, culturally and politically, and particularly by language, seems to match with the metaphor of narration of the story or the dramatic piece. This metaphor enables one, as Eloise A. Buker shows<sup>70</sup>, to interpret the process of becoming (gendered) subject as a construction, analogical to the story rendering: similarly to the hero of the story, the subject is also created by the story itself. The homogeneity of the story (subject) is based on the heterogeneity of many discourses and positions of subject, from which the story selects only some, making the others unheard. Narration of the story is a kind of activity, which makes visible some aspects of the story (subject) by naming them, therefore silencing the others. Identity constructed in this way is not transparent, because many aspects are marginalized, or even entirely omitted. The story (identity) is always partial, biased, perspectivistic, from a certain angle and in a way contingent and unfinished. We can continue telling the story, we can change it, but we can also end it and start the new one. The power of story to set human imagination in motion, and to open the different options for thinking about differences, is consciously used by Donna Haraway, especially in terms of science fiction. She uses the metaphor of the cyborg to challenge the borders between human and machine<sup>71</sup>. This metaphor (image) speaks about «transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities»<sup>72</sup>. Haraway also challenges the borders between humans

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>70</sup> E.A. BUKER, «Rhetoric in postmodern feminism: Put-offs, put-ons, and political plays», in R. HILEY, J.F. BOHMAN & R. SHUSTERMAN (eds.), *The Interpretative Turn. Philosophy, Science, Culture*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. 218-244.

<sup>71</sup> D. HARAWAY, «A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s», in L.J. NICHOLSON (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 190-234.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196.

and animals when telling the story about her dream to be pregnant with the embryo of another species<sup>73</sup>. Doing this, she hopes to develop «new possibilities for the meanings of difference, reproduction, and survival for specifically located members of the primate order»<sup>74</sup>. When Eloise A. Buker searches for an adequate metaphor for postmodern feminist politics, she offers the metaphor of the dramatic piece. In opposition to the metaphor of sport game, evoking the notion that politics is a competition, or even fight of one against the other, with a victory at stake (one above the other), the metaphor of the dramatic piece stresses the cooperation of theatre actors on stage in the creation of the life world (play). According to Buker, this analogy «helps us to develop images of ourselves as persons engaged in serious play —spontaneously responding and re-creating our environment, not by building eternal structures, but by constructing temporary ones to solve immediate local difficulties. The play analogy can help us to become more aware of our contingent existence by reminding us how delightful it is to interact with others who are able to surprise us into new ways of being»<sup>75</sup>. Postmodern feminists thus prefer metaphors, which can be actively involved into the process of discrediting an idea of «natural» gender identities, mostly in the man-woman duality. By «playing with boundaries», they «invite citizens to find multiple identities in themselves and through actions with others, including a multiplicity of genders —not just two»<sup>76</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Imagination is an indispensable and important aspect of philosophical thinking. However, there is still a small body of detailed analyses of metaphors used in philosophical texts, and of philosophical interpretations of particular metaphors. It is well documented that feminist philosophers inspired many innovative ideas and approaches in recent philosophy, the idea of interdependence of metaphors (images) and notions being one of them. Feminist philosophers not only develop different strategies when analyzing the usage of the woman (femininity) metaphor in the history of philosophy, but also actively participate in the process of changing the traditional visions of woman (femininity) by introducing new metaphors or re-interpreting the old ones. We explored the metaphor of pregnancy introduced by Julia Kristeva, the metaphor of the depths of the sea re-interpreted by Luce Irigaray, and the metaphor of story telling or theatre playing elaborated by Eloise A. Buker.

Each of these metaphors was interpreted with significant philosophical conclusions for the conception of the (gendered) subject. Kristeva portrays the subject,

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<sup>73</sup> D. HARAWAY, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York, Routledge, 1989.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 377.

<sup>75</sup> E.A. BUKER, *op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.



gendered female, as disjoined in itself, enabling therefore to understand masculinity and femininity as inner parts of both genders. Irigaray conceptualizes the process of becoming the female subject, passing between «I» and «You», flexible, changing and developing all potentialities, though modelled on femininity, valuable for both genders. Buker aims at disposing of any concept of the subject's (gender) identity, inviting us to actively play with the construction of our own subjectivity, in the interplay with others. It seems that metaphors chosen by particular philosophers match their philosophical program. Both Kristeva and Irigaray selected metaphors connected with women, arising from the fact that they consider gender differences to be important, not to say «essential» ones, while Buker's metaphor shows no specific gender associations, consequent to her view that here is no «ground» for them.

The above mentioned feminist metaphors participate in the process of changing both feminism and philosophy: feminism by challenging the notion of a dual system of gender, and philosophy by offering a more vivid idea of philosophizing based not only on rational thinking but also on imagination, and connected with life experiences. These feminist metaphors bring new possibilities for women to design their own identities.

