



DRAGGING ANTIGONE: FEMINISTQUEER READING TO MOVE BEYOND THE (GENDER) BINARY

Queering education and transgression in reading Anne Carson's *Antigonick*

Claudia Vitale

Main Supervisor: Domitilla Olivieri, Utrecht University

Second Supervisor: Rita Monticelli, Università di Bologna

Submitted to the Department of Gender Studies, Central European University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

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Abstract

Institutional readings of classical myths have been essential to the repetition of the gender binary within the heteronormative frame. Moving from my ‘local knowledge’, I reflect on critical and engaged education and the importance of non-normative methodologies – derived from the agenda of both feminist and queer pedagogy – to prompt a socio-political change. Accordingly, my research aims at creating a feministqueer reading method, so as to raise awareness of the multiple possibilities of self-identification beyond (gender) binary constrictions. As a consequence, it intends to develop emancipating and transgressing knowledge. Basing my theorization on standpoint epistemology and the concept of diffractive reading, I outline the feministqueer method of reading classical myths as a ‘praxis’ that undoes gender restrictions, by producing narratives which attest to difference, discriminations, identitarian multiplicities and fluid identifications. More precisely, this alternative method is a subversive practice that intends to fracture the ‘normalcy’ implicit in patriarchal and normative readings, through a series of resisting steps.

In the feministqueer reading process I suggest, the reader’s recognition of their resistances to patterns of (gender) normalcy and the practice of undoing such resistances come together to produce a feministqueer meaning beyond the gender binary. In order to give an example of this feministqueer reading method, I put it into practice by engaging with Anne Carson’s *Antigonick*. Thus, in opposition to the sexual difference-inspired analysis, I develop a provocative reading, following Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Throughout this feministqueer close reading, I drag Antigone and unravel the heroine’s wavering identity, which is somewhat ‘in the making’ and whose status undoes the fixity of gender borders and destabilizes both the immutability of gendered roles and the necessity of heteronormative relationships. My project therefore shows that reading myths from a feministqueer viewpoint is an educational practice which could influence and alter normative reading methods, deconstruct the gender binary and thus trigger a critical and social awareness able to overcome normative and hegemonic borders.

Abstract Italiano

Le interpretazioni tradizionali-istituzionali del mito classico sono state essenziali per la ripetizione e l'autenticazione del binarismo e dei ruoli di genere, entro un contesto esclusivamente eteronormativo. Muovendo dalla mia esperienza personale, intendo considerare l'importanza di un'educazione critica e partecipe che si serva di metodologie non normative, derivanti sia dalla pedagogia femminista, sia dalla pedagogia queer, allo scopo di promuovere un cambiamento culturale. La mia ricerca intende ideare un metodo feministqueer di lettura del mito classico che sviluppi un atteggiamento consapevole rispetto alle multiple possibilità di auto-identificazione, oltre l'obbligatorio dualismo di genere. In tal modo, questo nuovo metodo si propone di smuovere una conoscenza emancipativa e trasgressiva. Partendo dalla 'standpoint epistemology' e dal concetto di 'lettura diffrattiva', delinea il metodo di lettura feministqueer come una pratica che disfi le costrizioni di genere, producendo narrative che divulgano differenze, discriminazioni, varietà identitarie e identificazioni fluide. Più precisamente, tale metodo è una pratica di lettura sovversiva che intende rompere la normalità implicita nelle letture patriarcali e normative del mito, attraverso una serie di 'resistenze' al testo. Nella lettura che propongo, il riconoscimento delle resistenze rispetto alle rappresentazioni che rafforzano la normalità di genere e la conseguente decostruzione di tali resistenze sono i passaggi fondamentali che producono figurazioni feministqueer, libere dal dualismo gerarchico di genere. Dopo aver chiarito uno a uno i passaggi di tale metodo di lettura, li metto in pratica nella lettura dell'*Antigonick* di Anne Carson. In opposizione alle letture dell'Antigone che supportano una teoria della differenza sessuale, intendo sviluppare una lettura oltre il binarismo di genere, che rispecchi la performatività e la plasticità del genere, come elaborata da Judith Butler. Attraverso tale lettura 'maschero' Antigone, svelo la fluidità di questo carattere e il suo essere in continuo divenire; in tal modo attraverso il mito, decostruisco la fissità dei ruoli di genere e l'obbligatorietà di relazioni eteronormative. Tale progetto dimostra che leggere i miti classici attraverso un metodo di lettura feministqueer può essere una pratica educativa per decostruire il binarismo di genere; una pratica, infine, che genera consapevolezza rispetto alla molteplicità identitaria, oltre i limiti di un pensiero normativo, esclusivo ed egemonico.

Riassunto

Questa tesi nasce dal tentativo di decostruire le configurazioni di genere normalizzate, i ruoli di genere stereotipati e le relazioni obbligatoriamente eteronormative; più in generale, nasce dal tentativo di muoversi oltre il binarismo di genere, partendo da una pratica metodologica tradizionale e dalla sua rielaborazione: la lettura istituzionale del mito classico. In particolare, questa ricerca si propone di produrre una conoscenza anti-normativa, emancipativa e trasgressiva attraverso la strutturazione di un metodo alternativo di lettura del mito classico: una lettura ‘feministqueer’ per superare il binarismo di genere insito nelle letture canoniche. Radicato nella mia esperienza scolastica di lettura del mito classico attraverso una prospettiva eteronormativa, patriarcale e binaria, questo progetto fonde la Letteratura Classica e gli Studi di Genere, discipline che hanno caratterizzato entrambe il mio percorso accademico, con l’obiettivo di fornire un metodo di analisi alternativo a quello canonico. La mia tesi, dunque, si sviluppa a partire dalla constatazione empirica che le traduzioni e le interpretazioni istituzionali del mito classico ingabbiano i soggetti mitici in un’identità di genere fissa, o femminile o maschile; in ruoli di genere stereotipati e in un’eteronormatività obbligatoria, che naturalizza in tal modo un modello assoluto di normalità eterosessuale, patriarcale, binaria e gerarchica. Ancor più precisamente, tale progetto nasce da una consapevolezza del tutto Butleriana: continuando a ripetere attraverso letture normative, stereotipi di genere, ruoli oppositivi e relazioni eterosessuali si finisce per citare e dunque autorizzare il binarismo di genere e le gerarchie da esso imposte. Soltanto attraverso una lettura alternativa, ‘parodica’ e trasgressiva si può avviare un processo di decostruzione della norma binaria e di produzione di una conoscenza inclusiva.

Dunque, lo scopo di tale ricerca consiste nell’ideare un metodo di lettura ‘feministqueer’ del mito classico, in quanto pratica che destabilizzi la logica secondo la quale le identità e le relazioni normalizzate sono anche naturali e dunque, obbligatorie. Un metodo di lettura volto a enfatizzare la condizione impermanente, e non fissa delle identità post-moderne; infine, una lettura capace di produrre una conoscenza inclusiva di quelle identità e quelle relazioni che deviano dalla norma ‘maschile o femminile’. Questo progetto è calato nel contesto socio-culturale italiano, dal quale deriva la mia ‘esperienza normativa’ di lettura del mito. In generale, in questo progetto, il mito classico diventa uno strumento pedagogico per diffondere teorie femministe e queer; viceversa le teorie femministe e queer forniscono gli strumenti teorici attraverso i quali leggere il mito. Dunque, dalla convergenza di varie teorie, prevalentemente la teoria queer di Judith Butler, con l’esperienza personale deriva tale progetto socio-pedagogico: teorizzare un metodo di lettura feministqueer come strumento educativo per trasgredire la conoscenza normativa e suggerire una consapevolezza critica oltre il binarismo di genere incentrato su ruoli fissi e identità gerarchiche.

In tal modo, tale progetto costituisce un atto di resistenza contro la tendenza a intrappolare il genere in categorie fisse e offre una critica e un'alternativa alla ripetizione del binarismo di genere nelle pratiche di lettura.

Questa tesi è strutturata in quattro capitoli, chiamati 'episodi', per evocare la struttura della tragedia greca dalla quale estrapolo il mito di Antigone. Nel primo capitolo, localizzo la mia esperienza nel contesto educativo e socio-politico italiano. In tale percorso di 'disfacimento-rifacimento' del genere attraverso il mito, *in primis* 'situo' (Haraway, 1988) la mia posizione di ricercatrice feministqueer. Utilizzo il termine 'feminstqueer', esplicando l'impulso convergente tra le teorie femministe e queer, che guida la mia ricerca; inoltre, definisco il mio femminismo queer, in quanto principalmente impegnato a difendere la molteplicità di possibili auto-identificazioni oltre i confini binari di genere e volto, inoltre, alla decostruzione dell'idea che esista una 'normalità di genere'. Successivamente, chiarisco l'importanza del mito classico nel contesto culturale italiano, nelle cui scuole viene studiato in quanto fondamento della cultura occidentale. A questo proposito, mi soffermo sulla mia esperienza del tutto eteronormativa, patriarcale e binaria di lettura del mito classico a scuola, con particolare riferimento al mito di Antigone. Muovendo dalla consapevolezza che tale metodo di lettura del mito ripete la distinzione oppositiva tra maschile e femminile e inoltre, l'obbligatorietà di relazioni eteronormate, esprimo l'urgenza di diffondere un metodo di lettura alternativo che formi menti capaci di ragionare oltre la logica oppositiva che convalida gerarchie e relazioni di potere.

Nel secondo capitolo, definisco la metodologia che sostiene la mia tesi, nonché il metodo di lettura feministqueer: fondendo gli strumenti della metodologia femminista e della metodologia classica, in particolare la 'standpoint epistemology' e la 'diffractive reading' all'analisi filologica del testo, offro gli strumenti per affrontare un tipo di lettura che trasgredisca la fissità normativa delle interpretazioni istituzionali. Basandomi sulle teorie di Donna Haraway, relativamente a 'local knowledge', 'partial perspective' e 'partial objectivity', valido l'esperienza personale e situata come concreta fonte di conoscenza e allo stesso tempo oppongo il metodo di lettura feministqueer all'autorevolezza monolitica e universale a cui ambiscono le letture normative tradizionali. Inoltre, seguendo Karen Barad, definisco la pratica di lettura diffrattiva come un'interferenza tra il lettore e il testo in un determinato momento spazio-temporale, volta a enfatizzare i possibili contenuti trasformativi insiti nel testo stesso.

Una volta chiarita la struttura metodologica, definisco il metodo di lettura feministqueer, come un incontro situato, diffrattivo, critico e corporeo tra il lettore e il testo. Tale metodo decostruisce la normalità di genere; disfa il genere, inteso come configurazione fissa; ne legittima la complessità e la plasticità (Butler, 2004); decostruisce la polarità di genere e porta alla luce la molteplicità di

relazioni tra i generi. In particolare, in questa importante sezione strutturo una serie di passaggi metodologici che guidino il lettore nella lettura feministqueer del mito: posizionamento del lettore; individuazione e analisi delle resistenze a discorsi patriarcali e normativi, durante l'atto di lettura; decostruzione/disfacimento di tali resistenze; ricostruzione/ rifacimento di un significato feministqueer.

Il posizionamento di chi legge è necessario per produrre una conoscenza dal sé che ritorni al sé, rendendo la lettura una pratica politica di 'self-actualization' (hooks, 1994), ossia di auto-consapevolezza e realizzazione. Il secondo passaggio prevede l'analisi delle resistenze che chi legge mette in atto nei passaggi del testo in cui prevale un linguaggio e una logica (etero)normativa e patriarcale che enfatizza il binarismo di genere; la dove il genere è costretto entro un' opposizione dualistica maschile-femminile. Inoltre, le due fasi successive consistono, se possibile, nel disfare il binarismo di genere, produrre rappresentazioni aperte e non binarie, e dunque creare nuove connessioni interpretative che trascendano la norma. Questi momenti finali della lettura richiedono l'interpretazione delle resistenze attraverso il pensiero critico-teorico femminista e queer. Ne consegue che la lettura feministqueer è una pratica che, disfacendo le contraddizioni normative e binarie interne al testo sviluppa altre possibilità interpretative; così facendo, spinge il pensiero comune oltre i limiti normativi, mettendo in atto una pratica sovversiva che sfida le convenzioni della lettura.

Nel terzo capitolo, inserisco il mio progetto in un contesto pedagogico: la lettura feministqueer del mito classico è una potenziale pratica pedagogica per promuovere una conoscenza progressista e inclusiva delle differenze, oltre gli schemi binari. In particolare, propongo il metodo di lettura così strutturato, come una pratica educativa finalizzata a sviluppare una consapevolezza oltre il binarismo di genere; dunque, una pratica inclusiva delle molteplici possibilità identificatorie. Per chiarire questo punto, faccio riferimento ai concetti chiave della pedagogia femminista, derivante dalla pedagogia critica di Paulo Freire, e in particolare all'educazione in quanto strumento per trasgredire la norma, così come elaborata da bell hooks. Inoltre, esploro la pedagogia queer in quanto finalizzata all'intervento decostruttivo del concetto di normalità. In questa prospettiva di sovversione e interferenza provocativa con le pratiche educative che producono e ripetono normalità, colloco il mio progetto di lettura feministqueer del mito classico.

In un secondo momento in questa stessa sezione, chiarisco perché credo che i miti classici possiedano il potenziale per essere letti diversamente: il mito classico, viaggiando oltre lo spazio e il tempo, offre esempi multipli di caratteri identitari. Per questa varietà, il mito classico può essere un *medium* per andare oltre il pensiero della differenza, che alimenta l'eterosessualità obbligata, chiudendo le identità in una logica binaria costrittiva, e dunque può indirizzare il pensiero verso

forme fluide, dirompenti e contingenti d'identità. Data questa fluttuosità del mito classico, è mio interesse smontare gli assunti binari di genere che dominano le sue letture e approcciare una lettura contrastiva. Non invento nuove rappresentazioni a partire dal mito, ma mi calo criticamente nel mito classico per dimostrare come uno sguardo non canonico, anzi alternativo rispetto a quello normativo e binario, possa individuare la molteplicità di possibili identificazioni identitarie.

Nell'ultimo capitolo, metto in pratica, dimostrandone la validità, il metodo feministqueer di lettura del mito, attraverso la lettura dell'*Antigonick* di Anne Carson (2015). Mi soffermo sul mito di Antigone poiché l'eroina nella letteratura canonica è comunemente o simbolo di forza maschile che porta scompiglio all'ordine pubblico, o simbolo di un'identità femminile sottomessa e dominata da una società patriarcale soverchiante. A questo proposito, numerose letture del mito, soprattutto di alcune filosofe della differenza, quali Luce Irigaray, Rossana Rossanda e Adriana Cavarero, si sono concentrate sulla figura di Antigone come simbolo di donna icona della genealogia femminile: entrando in tale dibattito, ne prendo le distanze e rivaluto la fluidità di questo soggetto, oltre modelli di genere prestabiliti. Dimostro che l'eroina è un soggetto performativo che gioca con l'identità di genere e per la quale la messa in scena della mascolinità e della femminilità diventa una performance teatrale che determina appunto la sua stessa identità e il genere come una 'pratica' socialmente costruita.

Nella mia lettura, analizzo tre resistenze a interpretazioni e rappresentazioni binarie, (etero)normative e normalizzanti. La prima resistenza riguarda la tendenza di Creonte e Ismene a definire in termini binari le identità di genere; e di contro, il rifiuto di Antigone di cadere in tale logica. La seconda è rappresentata dall'accusa che Creonte volge ad Antigone di appropriarsi del *logos* politico e maschile. La terza resistenza riguarda il desiderio di Antigone, ossia il desiderio incestuoso del fratello. Alla luce di tali resistenze, decostruisco e ricostruisco un significato alternativo a quello normativo, attraverso la teoria queer di Judith Butler. Dimostro che Antigone sfida il modello obbligatorio di femminilità; e ancor di più, invade gli spazi socialmente attribuiti o al maschile o al femminile, si estende su uno e l'altro e se ne appropria con la parola e l'azione. L'eroina agisce attraverso la parodia eccentrica della norma e in tal modo trasgredisce l'ordine patriarcale dello stato. Inoltre, evitando ogni dichiarazione d'identificazione con un genere o un altro, Antigone agisce mossa dal suo desiderio incestuoso, il cui soddisfacimento le garantirebbe il riconoscimento a livello sociale come soggetto che desidera diversamente da ciò che la norma impone. Inoltre, rinunciando ai ruoli di madre e moglie, Antigone sfida gli stereotipi di genere, e le gerarchie di genere imposte dal sistema patriarcale.

Attraverso la ricostruzione dei nodi di resistenza, dimostro che Antigone devia dalla norma di genere e insorgendo provoca la destabilizzazione dell'ordine vigente. In tal modo, diventa un

soggetto politico che rompe le barriere di una fissità normalizzante, in primis di genere, esprimendosi come un'identità che non ammette classificazioni gerarchiche, e per questo capace di stravolgere l'ordine politico e sociale. Grazie a tale pratica di lettura, analizzo nel testo i passaggi in cui Antigone cela il loro essere 'dragged' e in tal modo, enfatizzo il suo carattere strategicamente performativo. In altri termini, mostro quando e come Antigone indossa maschere, si traveste, si sveste, assume identificazioni differenti, agisce e parla in modalità non univoche che le permettono di uscire dai vincoli binari in cui la tradizione interpretativa comunemente la ingabbia. Porto così alla luce la natura queer di Antigone che sfugge alle opposizioni di genere obbligate, declinando 'performativamente' i molti sé che la abitano.

In conclusione, questa tesi offre un chiaro approccio metodologico per svincolarsi dal pensiero binario, che caratterizza l'epistemologia tradizionale occidentale, nonché il metodo di lettura tradizionale; inoltre, offre un metodo di lettura alternativo a quello canonico, che permette di indagare le molteplici possibilità oltre il dualismo oppositivo 'maschile-femminile'. In altre parole, il mio progetto consiste nel 'disfare il genere' nella lettura del mito classico e successivamente nel disfare quei meccanismi semplicistici che oppongono un'identità femminile a una maschile, riproducendo una logica binaria, esclusiva, e limitante.

Attraverso questo progetto di lettura alternativa del mito classico, mi propongo di rigiocare appartenenze e rappresentazioni identitarie già presenti nei curricula italiani. Questo è un esercizio di critica femminista e di risignificazione che richiede il coinvolgimento diretto di chi legge attraverso un'interazione con il testo che tenta di decontaminare la mente del lettore e il mito stesso da quegli assunti (etero)normativi che congelano le relazioni e le identità in due binari di genere fissi. La mia lettura feministqueer tenta di contrastare le interpretazioni che schiacciano e confinano le eroine del mito classico in una fissità di contorni tipicamente (etero)normativa e patriarcale, cercando *in primis* di sbiadire tali confini identitari e liberare i soggetti da costrizioni che tendono a identificarli esclusivamente come identità femminili o maschili; in secondo luogo mostrando le (intra)interazioni di genere, sesso, sessualità, identità, che determinano la molteplicità di possibili identificazioni. Dunque, il mio progetto propone una lettura feministqueer del mito classico come strumento metodologico nuovo per mettere in luce forme fluide e mutevoli d'identità, soggetti performativi e configurazioni identitarie *queer*. Il fine ultimo consiste nel proporre un metodo di lettura 'alternativo' rispetto a quello istituzionale, che possa fare del mito classico uno strumento pedagogico per educare al genere, alle differenze di genere, alla decostruzione degli stereotipi, e soprattutto per sviluppare un pensiero che esca dalla logica del binarismo femminile/maschile che autorizza e conferma le discriminazioni sociali. Attraverso tale studio intendo offrire gli strumenti metodologici per leggere il mito classico con una lente feministqueer che non produca letture

normalizzanti e normative, che sono prettamente anacronistiche, ma piuttosto che permetta di disfare le concezioni di pensiero dominanti, patriarcali, egemoniche e binarie, che dettano politiche restrittive in materia di genere e neutralizzano i soggetti, negando la realizzazione delle identità non conformi alla norma.

Introduction

This text continues, then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender troubled, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusion of identity (Butler, 2007, p.46).

Sometimes, it might be helpful if we went hundreds of kilometres away or hundreds of years back, to the past that we know only through legends and myths in order to see what can be found there [...]: ourselves (Wolf, 1988, p.11).

This dissertation stems from my commitment to uncover and to deconstruct normalized configurations of gender and, consequently, to break down the gender-binary constructions throughout my active intervention in educational methodologies. In particular, it mirrors my conscious engagement in producing anti-normative, inclusive and transgressing knowledge through the creation of a feministqueer method of reading classical myths. Indeed, this project – grounded in my academic experience of reading classical myths through a heteronormative, patriarchal and binary lens – derives from a ‘Butlerian conscientization’: by repeating patriarchal and exclusionary readings of classical myths, the reader ‘cites’ the norms, thus validating them through mimesis. Therefore, in order to interfere with dominant norms, which consolidate hierarchies, it is necessary to stop citing them and thus to create new, parodic methods of reading. Indeed, this thesis intends to propose a transformative, feministqueer method, by proving on the one hand, that classical myth is a pedagogical medium to transmit feministqueer knowledge; on the other, that feministqueer theories can provide a theoretical tool through which to read myths critically.

This research is a mosaic of a multitude of voices, different disciplinary fields and various modes of writing, which, combined together, contribute to my purpose of designing a new, feministqueer method of reading classical myths. Coherently, the disciplines involved, the dissertation’s structure and the diverse theoretical frame all mirror the intersectional approach that I adopt throughout my research. Indeed, as far as the relevant disciplines are concerned, I describe a socio-pedagogical backdrop, in which various postmodern gender theorists’ viewpoints interact, in order to support my creation of an alternative method of reading myths: essentially, I bring together contributions from critical pedagogy, gender theories and Classics. From a methodological perspective, this dissertation is informed by my refusal to separate experience from theoretical outcomes: this means that theory and practice intra-act in order to ground my project in the

contemporary Italian socio-political system. Furthermore, concerning the style and the structure, my academic writing alternates between a lyrical voice, employed in several passages where I reproduce the structure of a Greek play – the *prologos*, the *stasimon*, the *episodes* and the *exodus* –, and a more theoretical voice. These multiple tones vehicle an attempt to fuse different styles within my academic writing. I deliberately choose to mix different voices - a poetic or lyrical voice with a more linear and theoretical one – because this shift is a way of resisting the pull towards a linear and fixed way of thinking and writing. Alongside this, the multiple levels of intersectionality symbolize the structure of the postmodern ‘identity’ that I evoke in this project, seen as a complex inter-action between changeable identitarian axes. Thus, not the linearity of a single thread of thought, but rather the convergence of multiple theories with personal experience allows me to develop this socio-pedagogical project: I thus theorize a feministqueer method of reading classical myths as an educational medium to transgress normative knowledge and foster critical awareness, beyond the gender binary that supports fixed roles and hierarchic identities. Overall, I intend to identify lines of flight: in other words, creative and alternative spaces of becoming, that do not fall within closed (gender) binary categories, but move within and beyond these categories. In this respect, my feministqueer pedagogical project constitutes an act of resistance against the tendency to entrap gender in close and unchangeable identitarian categories; furthermore, it provides a critique and, thus, an alternative to the repetition of the (gender) binary in reading practices.

Therefore, in the first chapter/episode, I posit my local experience within the Italian context, both educational and socio-political, and situate myself as a feministqueer researcher. Accordingly, I clarify the importance of myth as a pedagogical medium, due to their relevance in the Italian schools system, in which they are studied as foundational for Italian culture. Hence, I focus on my heteronormative and ‘sexual difference-inspired’ experience of reading classical myths at school – looking in particular at Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Moving from the awareness that this canonical way of reading myths repeats the distinction between female and male roles and the necessity of the heteronormative relationship, I express the urgency of elaborating an alternative method of reading. Within accordance with my feministqueer project, I first of all posit myself as a feministqueer researcher, explaining that my feminism is queer inasmuch as it addresses the multiplicity of possible identifications beyond fixed, gender constrictions and aims at intervening on gender normalcy.

In the second chapter, I identify the methodology sustaining my research as derived from feminist epistemology of location and diffractive reading. Drawing on Donna Haraway’s standpoint epistemology, I consider my situated experience a valid source of knowledge. Consequently, the situated knowledge that comes from my experience is not relativistic; rather, it provides ‘partial

objectivity'. Furthermore, following Karen Barad, I draw on the practice of diffractive reading as the interference of the reader with a text in a certain spacetio-temporal dimension. Diffraction is also a transformative methodology of textual analysis, which sends back new and ever-changing patterns. Coming from this methodological standpoint, I propose a feministqueer close reading method as a diffractive, situated and subversive method of reading myths. In this section, I outline and demonstrate the steps of this praxis, focusing particularly on the reader's situation and their resistance in engaging with (gender) binary and (hetero)normative discourses. Indeed, the feministqueer reading method I suggest involves the act of uncovering these resistances, reverting them and then reconstructing an alternative system of signification. The aim is not merely to deconstruct, but to reconfigure identities and gender identifications within myth, on non-binary grounds that account for multiple possibilities.

In the third chapter, I engage with feministqueer pedagogy and classical myths. In particular, I draw on the feminist pedagogy deriving from Freire's critical pedagogy, by drawing on bell hooks' education to transgress. Then, inspired by hooks, I define my method of reading myths as a practice to produce emancipating knowledge. Furthermore, I investigate queer pedagogy, exploring its intervention into normalcy, which is, indeed, the provocative interference of my feministqueer reading method. In this respect, I clarify that myths can be used in educational contexts as a means to introduce the idea of possibilities that overcome boundaries of time and space; for this reason, they have the potential to be read differently, distancing oneself from traditional reading methods that 'cite' and corroborate norms.

In the last chapter, I put into practice the feministqueer method in reading Anne Carson's *Antigonick*. Thus, drawing on Hegel, Lacan, Luce Irigaray, Rossana Rossanda and Adraiana Cavarero, I firstly reference the 'sexual difference-inspired' debate on Antigone – namely, the debate that continues to entrap Antigone within fixed configurations of gender. Then, I introduce the *Antigonick* as an example of 'transference-translation' that challenges temporality and I read the play with my feministqueer gaze. In so doing, I firstly analyze three resistances to patterns of gender normalization within the text: Antigone's tendency to not define her gender identity; the king Kreon's accusation of Antigone's appropriation of the political '*logos*'; and her desire of her beloved brother. Secondly, I deconstruct these resistances and, by 'dragging Antigone', I finally reconstruct a feministqueer meaning that transcends the binary, following Judith Butler's queer theory.

In conclusion, my dissertation provides an alternative methodological tool to question and challenge the dominant, (hetero)normative and binary logic through which institutional readings interpret classical myths and secure dominant norms. More precisely, it proposes a method of

reading through a feministqueer gaze that subverts and transgresses dogmatic-normative methods, and raises awareness of the multiple possibilities of self-identification beyond the gender binary. In addition, it tests the efficacy of this method, by practicing it in a close reading of the myth of Antigone. In providing a method of reading myths that ‘does and undoes gender’ and reveals it as a wavering-performative practice, I commit myself to help develop forms of emancipating knowledge from texts that are already central to the Italian curricula. Accordingly, feministqueer practice could change the binary method through which classical myths are read in Italian schools and prompt a new social awareness. Indeed, by engaging with Antigone’s myth and, more in general, by looking back to a past we know only through myths, we may discover ourselves more authentically as feministqueer identities in the making.

Πρόλογος¹

“We begin in the dark” (Carson, 2015, p.9).

I bring Antigone² to the spot in secret; we are whispering, no-one can hear us.

Me: Dear, dear Antigone, you taught me so much, please do it again. Did you hear about the cultural disorder, the social disasters happening in my country, in Italy? What is changing and what is still static, around us?

Antigone: I have heard nothing, neither good nor bad. Please, tell me.

Me: “That’s what I thought.

that’s why I called you out here” (Carson, 2015, p. 9), to tell you about it, secretly and alone.

The rulers have ratified the homophobic decree. After the Family Day and the vote of the stepchild adoption law, there is a sense of loss among activists and human rights fighters. There is a general sense of being stuck; I feel immobilized, trapped between the political establishment and the majority of people that remain equally homophobic and closed to identitarian multiplicity. Confusion regarding sex, sexual difference, gender, identity and family is widespread; any non-normative educational programme is almost forbidden; and curricula keep on transmitting non-inclusive, patriarchal and hegemonic thoughts. Politicians and right-wing parties refrain from developing any critical consciousness about gender, and contribute to silencing issues of identitarian multiplicity in the name of close-bound normative categories. They claim to protect children from danger, while instead they are only protecting themselves and their conservative and

¹I have given my dissertation the structure of Greek tragedy – the first tool that allowed the diffusion of the oral knowledge contained in myths. According to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, tragedy is divided into “prologue, episode, exodus and choral units. The latter can be divided into choral entry (*parodos*) and the choral ode (*stasimon*)” (Halliwell, 1987, p.43). As far as the prologue is concerned, Halliwell, translating Aristotle’s *Poetics*, argues that it is “the entire portion of a tragedy preceding the choral entry” (Halliwell, 1987, p.43). This section can be a monologue or a dialogue and it provides information regarding the drama’s setting: above all, it gives the audience spatiotemporal coordinates. The structure I have given my dissertation attempts thus to mime the structure of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. In particular, in the *prologos*, in the *stasimon* and in the *exodos*, I attempt to cite some of the issues that Anne Carson brings forth in *Antigonick* (2015). Carson’s prologue consists of a dialogue between the protagonist, Antigone, and her sister Ismene; accordingly, the prologue that I have personally re-created represents an actualization and personal internalization of the prologue of *Antigonick*. Indeed, I cast myself as Antigone’s imaginary interlocutor, and take on the informative role that, in the original tragedy, belongs to Antigone herself: by ‘dragging’ myself as Antigone, I present the Italian context. Thereby, my prologue serves ultimately not only to mimic the play’s content, but also to overturn its *prologos*: indeed, I imagine myself in dialogue with the heroine, and simultaneously I become Antigone herself. Throughout this inversion of roles and identities, I bring my context – the Italian political and educational systems – at the heart of my dissertation and I also give voice to Antigone – recalling what Carson does in *Antigonick*, as I will show in the last chapter. This symbolic encounter, between Antigone and myself, allows me to get close to the heroine and also to distance myself, as is necessary, from Sophocles’ original, which I am not going to analyse in my project – I focus, rather, on *Antigonick*: a ‘translation-transference’ (Butler, 2012) of the original play. Therefore, throughout my *prologos*, I connect the ancient tragedy, the character of Antigone, my personal reading of the myth and my reading of *Antigonick*.

²*Antigone* is a tragedy written by Sophocles in or before 441 BC. Sophocles (497- 406 BC) is one of the three greatest ancient Greek tragedians whose plays have survived. *Antigone* was performed for the first time in Athens in 442 BC. It is the third of the Theban Plays, following *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. I will summarize the tragedy’s plot in the fourth chapter of my thesis.

anti-democratic political agenda. But, Antigone, if things have come this far, what can I do? How could I possibly help?

Antigone: Your reaction has to come – as mine did.

Me: Reaction, indeed. What prevents my country from becoming an inclusive democracy? From eradicating a binary logic, which considers human beings as necessarily neither male or female? From a dualistic framework, which recognizes as ‘natural’ and ‘proper’ only those families made up of a male father and a female mother?

Antigone: You are corporeally bound to your place, but also intimately detached from hetero-normative, exclusive and anti-democratic politics, as I was too. Enact your own intervention, moved by the skills, knowledge and passion you have.

Me: I wonder where to begin in order to bring about a social change.

Antigone: You have a responsibility, go and do not stop.

Me: I wonder what is my responsibility as a researcher; how I could catalyse political transformation as a feminist activist; how I can transgress.

Antigone: Go; find your way in life itself. I support your voice and your actions towards a social transformation.

We both exit through opposite sides. Pause. Lights.

1. *First Episode*³

Setting the stage: content and context

1.1 Synopsis: my intersectional experience

In this chapter I set the scene of ‘my play’, introducing the content and clarifying the context from which this research arises. Firstly, I briefly point out the fundamental role of experience as the starting point of my project and the first means to produce knowledge in feminist pedagogy: indeed, ‘personal experience’ is the orienting force of my ‘play’. I then situate myself as the ‘director of the play’ and I locate this project in the Italian socio-educational context. My research – Dragging Antigone: a feministqueer reading beyond the gender binary. Feminist pedagogy, education and transgression in reading Anne Carson’s *Antigonick* – represents the entangled intersection of my personal and academic experiences. Indeed, I would like this project to represent a closing circle, which tries intimately to give a finite sense to my academic experience, by linking different sides of my own life, whilst publicly attempting to be useful in orienting the education system towards the deconstruction of binary methods. For this reason, this project begins by staging my own personal involvement and especially from the concreteness of my own experience, which enables me to reach a rigorous understanding of the word around me.⁴ In this respect, I move from a personal

³As my dissertation is informed by a close reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, along with a number of feminist philosophers’ interpretations of this myth, and as many insights into how to read classical myths critically have come from an active engagement with either Greek tragedy or myth itself, I intend to give my dissertation the structure of a Greek tragedy. Thus the first chapter will be considered as the first episode. In Halliwell’s translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1987, p.44), the philologist argues that “an episode is the entire portion of a tragedy preceding the choral entry. An episode is an entire portion of a tragedy lying between complete choral odes”. Greek tragedies are usually composed of at least three episodes consisting of dialogue among actors. Following this structure, my ‘play’ – in other words, my dissertation – will be composed of fourth episodes – i.e. four chapters.

⁴When I speak of ‘the world around me’, I refer mainly to the Italian political, social and educational context. Indeed, my studies, coupled with the experience I have had of the socio-political system I belong to, have brought to my attention a collective urgency, in my country, to reflect on the notions of gender, sex and sexual identity. Having noticed a widespread confusion and unwillingness to confront these issues, I started thinking of the impact of pedagogical practices in shaping minds, language and critical thinking. In this respect, Western thought – and the Italian cultural system especially, as the focus of my research – has been influenced by the ancient Greeks’ intellectual framework based on binary oppositions, such as man/woman; culture/nature; private/public. As a consequence, this is the common, ‘canonical’ and institutional way of thinking that still dominates the political, socio-cultural and educational fields today. Accordingly, the main focus of my research stems from my awareness of the necessity of bringing issues related to gender into the Italian political debate on education and methodologies. Even though gender-related topics are more and more present in discussions about education, the concept of ‘gender’ is still entrapped in a binary logic which excludes the possibility of the emancipative inclusiveness of gender fluid or gender non-conforming identities. In this respect, in order to deconstruct a sexist, patriarchal and heteronormative logic, it is necessary firstly to erase the much taken for granted female/male binary within gender categories. Accordingly, I firmly believe that it is necessary in my cultural and political context to overcome the gender binary, including all identities situated beyond or within the binary – I will use the term ‘queer’ to include the multitude of identitarian possibilities – in order to acknowledge the multiplicity of possible (gender) identifications. To conclude, I depart from my surroundings, which are very much entrapped in the female/male, woman/man binary, in order to assert that a social transformation towards inclusivity can be possible only by escaping from the binary rhetoric/logic that I intend to deconstruct. In other terms,

assumption made by the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler⁵. In the preface to *Gender Trouble* (1999, p.9) – widely considered the founding text of queer theory – she argues: “that I can write in an autobiographical mode does not, I think, relocate this subject that I am, but perhaps it gives the reader a sense of solace that there is someone here”. Accordingly, I intend to be here, as a researcher and writer, in order to muse about my own experience⁶ as a way to produce knowledge from within myself, which is, thus, radically embodied. I highlight the importance of ‘starting from the self’ as an instrument to elaborate personal events, not at an abstract and universal level, rather at a situated but public one; and also as a methodology that gives academic value to styles of writing based on personal experience. More specifically, my project derives from my wish to look back at my past academic experience, both in school and during my undergraduate studies – in particular, at the way I read the myth of Antigone – and thus revise and reformulate socio-educational insights through experience itself, in order to propose a new educational-reading method:

Ci si batte sempre a partire da quello che si attraversa o che accade. Come scrive Oscar Wilde: “Le cose vere della vita non si studiano, né si imparano, ma si incontrano.” E affinché il pensiero possa essere realmente incarnato – come ho già scritto e detto e rivendicato – non può che partire dall’evento, da ciò che ci attraversa e ci sconvolge, da ciò che ci interroga e ci costringe a rimettere tutto in discussione (Marzano, 2015, p.88)⁷.

Accordingly, in this project I attempt to bring together my interests and to relate them to a mature and aware ‘conscientization’⁸, in order to develop means for creating alternative educational methods. In particular, the mutually illuminating interplay of Classics and Gender Studies shapes my interest towards developing a feministqueer reading method via classical myths. Indeed, as my final project, this dissertation satisfies my need to intersect several academic approaches and methodologies developed in different fields, in order to derive critical knowledge⁹ from this

there is no solution to binary eradication if we keep on reproducing that binary system through didactic and dialectic methods.

⁵ Judith Butler (1956) is an American philosopher and gender theorist whose work has strongly influenced philosophy and ethics in feminist and queer fields. In my feministqueer project, I mainly draw on her theories on gender.

⁶ I will expound upon my personal experience in the third paragraph of this chapter. So far, it is sufficient to say that the experience I mention as underlying my project consists, in general terms, in my studies that have focussed thus far on the intersection between Gender Studies and Classics. In more detailed terms, I refer particularly to the formal and normalizing reading of the myth of Antigone that I was pushed to pursue during my time in secondary-school and my undergraduate studies.

⁷ “We always fight, starting from what we need. As Oscar Wilde notices: “We do not study true things of life, neither we learn them, rather we encounter them”. In order to have a embodied thought – as I have already written down and revenged – it has to come from an event, from what passes through ourselves and shakes us; it questions and doubts everything” (My translation).

⁸ A term used repeatedly by the pedagogist Paulo Freire, in reference to self-awareness. I will further specify the meaning of this word in the third chapter. Paulo Freire (1921-1997) is one of the most influential theorists of critical and liberatory education: I will address his thought mainly in the third chapter, while discussing feminist pedagogy.

⁹ In the chapter concerned with my methods of analysis, I will clarify the notion of ‘critical knowledge’ in relation to the practice of close reading, which is in itself a way of acquiring knowledge. For now, it is sufficient to say that with the term ‘critical knowledge’ I refer to self-engaged and embodied knowledge, which comes from a profound

intersection. Furthermore, it attempts to connect theory and practice through the fundamental role of educational practices in modeling thinkers and citizens simultaneously.

I believe that education – and I refer to both school and university – imprints personal growth, which in turn influences public outcomes: for this reason, in order to find ways to create a dynamic and critical society, I feel the paramount need to engage with education from the perspective of my own experience of it and especially to create new methodological guidelines. In sum, I aim to bring into mutual relation classical myths and gender theories, by revealing the concreteness implicit in classical myths and, subsequently, by pointing out the extent to which an alternative method can shape mindsets beyond the (gender)¹⁰ binary. Therefore, it becomes clear why my personal experience of reading myths and, more in general, the notion of experience as such are the invisible thread unifying all the chapters; in other words, I legitimate experience as an appropriate site of intellectual inquiry. As the feminist social activist and professor bell hooks – whose thought I will analyze in relation to education – argues in *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994, p.70):

This is to me what makes feminist transformation possible. Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory, because it usually forms the base of our theory making.

In particular, I start from my experience as a reader in order to justify the need for a transformation¹¹ in the practice of reading myths; in addition, experience¹² acquires a notable importance in my work, since it is the means through which feminist and queer pedagogies

interrogation of myth. Broadly speaking, critical knowledge entails a relationship of mutual exchange between the knower and the known.

¹⁰ I often use the term ‘gender’ next to the term ‘binary’ in brackets. Indeed, I primarily refer to the gender binary, but I simultaneously intend to indicate that the term ‘binary’ includes any kind of binary, oppositional and hierarchical logic that characterizes Western thought.

¹¹ Following hooks (1994), I often apply the term ‘transformation’ to education and methodologies. With this term, I refer to the kind of socio-political change that can be brought about through knowledge, namely through an improvement in the education system. In particular, I aspire to a transformation of the community deriving from the inclusion of gender-related issues in schools and other places of education. More precisely, in the wake of hooks, with the word ‘transformation’ I indicate the moment in which one begins to think critically about one’s self and the identities of those one is surrounded by, in relation to one’s political circumstances. Thus, the term refers to a self-transformation which can develop a social change.

¹² It is necessary to clarify the term ‘experience’. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1985, p.126) sketches the various ways the term ‘experience’ has been used in the Anglo-American tradition. He defines experience as “knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration and reflection; and a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from ‘reason’ or ‘knowledge’”. Until the early eighteenth century, he claims, the terms ‘experience’ and ‘experiment’ were tightly connected, designating a mode of acquiring knowledge based on testing and observation. In such a conception, experience gained value in relation to vision – and I will further discuss the concept of vision when describing my methodology. Furthermore, according to Williams, in the eighteenth century the concept of ‘experience’ entailed those of ‘reflection’ and ‘observation’. In opposition to this notion, what I will bring forth in my analysis – in the chapter related to diffraction – is a concept of experience as related to the production of situated and diffractive knowledge, i.e. a non-formal knowledge based on personal experience.

operate¹³: as I will show in the third chapter, experience is the basis for feministqueer knowledge and, subsequently, for feministqueer political action.

Hence, in this research, I use my experience as a source that, once interrogated, can give rise to an alternative form of situated knowledge; in so doing, I support the idea of engaging with one's own experience in order to attain an alternative knowledge process. Leading on from hooks (1994), who argues for the need to bring experience into the classroom, in my project I use experience as a means not of asserting my own voice, but rather of acquiring knowledge, allowing my voice to coexist non-hierarchically with other voices. I agree with hooks, who claims that experience is one of the richest tools available to feminist pedagogy; indeed, liberation, which is the latter's main purpose, derives from the act of freeing ourselves from constrictions: "critical pedagogy of liberation necessarily embraces experience, confessions and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process" (hooks, 1994, p.89). In this respect, I want to clarify that it is necessary, when dealing with one's personal experience, to avoid the risk of universalizing it. As I will show in the next chapter – while discussing standpoint epistemology – experience is always partial, situated and socially constructed: "I know that experience can be a way to know and can inform how we know and what we know" (hooks, 1994, p.90). Inasmuch as it stems from an individual dialogue between a subject and their personal experience, any derived knowledge can assume multiple forms.

That said, I think that analyzing the experiences one has lived provides a source of knowledge that can contribute, with its own particular location, to the illumination of transformative social processes. Consequently, to derive knowledge from one's own experience is a way to concretize and to ground the knowledge itself in its social context. As hooks argues, merging different locations and multiple experiences can encourage inclusiveness: "I share as much as possible the need for critical thinkers to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, to allow us to gather knowledge fully and inclusively" (hooks, 1994, p.91). In sum, starting from my intersectional academic experience, that sees the interaction of Gender Studies and Classics, I was

¹³ According to Diana Fuss (1989), experience is at the root of postpositivism, whose steps are followed by feminist and queer pedagogies. Indeed, postpositivism argues that contemporary epistemology is too obsolete and needs new visions in order to generate a form of social knowledge informed by the complexity of human experience. Such a thought has influenced feminist theorists and activists. In this respect, the debate on experience in feminist theory has very far-reaching roots. Indeed, in women's movements, claims regarding experience as a source of knowledge for women rested on the belief that women's experience was characterised by a certain commonality – thus, women were conceived as an undifferentiated group. In fact, such an assumption was applicable only to the world of the White, middle-class, heterosexual women of early feminist movements. Subsequent critiques made by lesbians, women of colour, non middle-class women and postmodernist feminist theorists, among others, clarified the idea that there is no single 'female experience'. As Fuss comments: "female experience is never as unified, as knowable, as universal, and as stable as we presume it to be" (1989, p.114).

able to develop a critical awareness concerning the normalizing¹⁴ way of reading classics in institutional contexts. Consequently, such an interdisciplinary experience justifies my wish to propose a feministqueer method of reading classic myths able to transcend these norms, while mirroring the multiplicity of possible identification beyond (gender) binary constrictions.

1.2 My feminism is queer: gender, queer and the ‘beyond’

Having explained the function of experience in my research and having anticipated its importance in feminist and queer pedagogy, I here wish to locate my position as a researcher, and insist in particular on the characteristics of my feminism. Given that my engaging standpoint is a complex blend of personal perspectives and academic fields, I would like to clarify the sense of my feminism along with queer possibilities. In other words, in order to make sense of my ‘experience-based research’, firstly I need to position myself as an aspirant feministqueer¹⁵ researcher who is willing

¹⁴ I use the term ‘normalizing’ in reference to practices and educational methods that foster a knowledge based on normalcy and fixed borders of acceptability – namely forms of normative knowledge that reproduce traditional and dominant frameworks.

¹⁵ The tension surrounding the split between feminism and queer is still strong: the term feministqueer aspires to decrease such a tension. According to Lynne Huffer (2013, p.6), “that differentiation-through-splitting, initiated from within feminism by sexual thinkers like Gayle Rubin (1984) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), has been reaffirmed by feminist and queer theorists alike, although many have repeatedly cautioned against the reductionism of a binary opposition between a queer attention to sexuality and a feminist focus on gender”. I agree with the idea that reproducing a binary logic opposing feminism to queer is a mere simplification. More specifically, I echo Huffer in arguing that “the queer feminism I invoke might seem to go against the grain of some of the more radically antifoundationalist strands of queer theory” (2013, p.6). Indeed, if the antifoundationalist strands of queer theory distance themselves from feminism, claiming they have “divergentist positions” (2013, p.7); on the other hand, following Huffer, a convergentist impulse drives my research. In my convergentist perspective, I have been strongly influenced by Judith Butler, who, in *Undoing gender* (2004, p.9), argues for a feminism that takes gender as a multi layered historical category, which shares certain principles with other activisms and then, with queer activists as well: “That feminism has always countered violence against women, sexual and nonsexual, ought to serve as a basis for alliance with these other movements, since phobic violence against bodies is part of what joins antihomophobic, antiracist, feminist, trans, and intersex activism”. Following Butler, my feminism is informed by a similar, intersectional perception. Accordingly, I do not want to reproduce fixed boundaries among these terms, but I would prefer to focus on their potential to merge. For example, “early models of lesbian studies and related practices tended, overwhelmingly to situate lesbianism within feminism; that is to say, to argue, for example, that the ethical axioms of feminism ought, necessarily, to inform the practices of lesbian sexuality” (Bryson, de Castel, 1993, p.295).

Conversely, by using the word ‘feministqueer’ I underscore my commitment to continuity and convergence. In addition, I use the term feministqueer rather than queer feminist, because I insist on the fact that I give a particular focus to my feminism, that is the interference with gender normalcy, which is the queer theories’ purpose. Thereby, in exploring the meaning of my feministqueer viewpoint, I move away from Huffer, who talks about a ‘queer feminism’, as many other scholars do. Although I could not find any scholars who adopt the term ‘feministqueer’, I decided to use it anyway, in order to insist that I move from a feminism – namely, my commitment for human rights which departed from women’s struggles – which engages particularly with queer possibilities beyond the gender binary. In other words, I insist on the queer discussion about the multiple possibilities of self-identification as a useful point departing from and returning to feminism. Moreover, I have decided to write it as one word because it visually conveys the idea of two parts that are actually at one: putting them together means embracing their mutual exchanges and their common grounds in the face of identitarian differences. Indeed, in the wake of Donna Haraway’s ‘natureculture’ – employed in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) – with the term ‘feministqueer’ I try to deconstruct, both as a sign and as a signifier, the binary logic that throughout my dissertation I aim to undo. In conclusion, merging together the feminist with the queer, I call not only for a new approach to sexual and gender-related thinking, but also for an alternative conception of non-binary, identitarian multiplicity.

to take sides and express herself actively in personal experience. In what follows, I will explain the term ‘feministqueer’ in relation to the concept of gender, the necessity of deconstructing the gender binary and the idea behind the expression ‘multiple queer possibilities’.

In *We should all be feminists*, Ngozi Adichie Chimamanda¹⁶ sums up what the term ‘feminist’ means. I quote such a definition of feminism, because it is the one which I most agree with:

Why the world feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that? Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general – but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way denying that the problem of gender targets women. That the problem was not about being human, but specifically about being a female human. For centuries, the world divided human beings into two groups and then proceeded to exclude and oppress one group. It is only fair that the solution to the problem should acknowledge that (Chimamanda, 2014, no pagination).

I adopt such a wide meaning of the word ‘feminism’, as I strongly believe that being a feminist can be translated into finding one’s own spot under such a multi-layered umbrella-term, and situating oneself by starting from one’s personal experience in order to improve inclusiveness. Thus, each person may construct their own feminism, developing a specific stream that, once merged with other feminisms, forms ‘feminism’ as such. Accordingly, the feminism I personally identify with is queer. In fact, when it comes to defining my ‘location’ as a feminist, I am always uncomfortable in defining myself as either feminist or queer, or even both. This position is an especially hard one to adopt within the panorama of feminist researchers in the field of Classics, because the feminist debate regarding myths and the close reading of classical texts often focuses on a female-male dualism, aiming at either revenging a hidden, heroic femininity, or lamenting the masculine, patriarchal hegemony. Thus, within such a debate that does little more than repeat the gender binary, I cannot situate myself only as a feminist, so I define myself as a feministqueer researcher. Inasmuch as I do not want to use categorizing terms, I need to clarify why I will repeatedly use the term ‘feministqueer’ instead of only ‘feminist’ or ‘queer’, and I will explain this choice by referring to my aim of undoing gender binaries through a feministqueer methodology.

First of all, a feministqueer approach allows me to include queer identities within my feminism. According to Professor Sharon Marcus (2005), both feminist and queer theory owe something to each other, so for me it is necessary to mention both terms when locating my position.

In 1989 [...] feminist theory shifted from studying women to studying gender as a set of relations, and lesbian and gay studies analogously moved from tracing historically stable identities based on object choice to defining queerness [...] Those parallel shifts have created

¹⁶ Ngozi Adichie Chimamanda (1977) is a Nigerian novelist and writer. *We should all be feminists* is written after a TEDx talk that Adichie gave in 2013. She shared her experience as an African feminist, and her commitment to reflect upon issues of gender construction and sexuality.

intersections between queer and feminist scholars who now share gender and sexuality as objects of analysis (Marcus, 2005, p.195).

Accordingly, I believe that feminism and queer theory have been historically influenced; thus, these two terms, which subtend several common theories, must be seen as convergent in order to understand the nature of my feminism. Indeed, in the debate between feminists and queer theorists, I do not agree with those who think that by undermining gender as a stable category, queer theory devalues feminism, which exclusively concerns the category of women. I consider instead that, more importantly, both feminist and queer approaches rest on floating and non-static notions of identity. In arguing this, I follow Marcus, who foregrounds how feminism and queer theory ascribe plasticity¹⁷ and changeability to the notion of identity, which is a complex conflating of several components.

It could be argued that by undermining gender as a stable category, queer theory undermines feminism, which depends on the concept of woman. However, this fear is groundless, for two reasons. First, queer theory does not completely abandon the concept of gender [...] Queer theory simply refuses the strict limits that heterosexism sets on the possible configurations of gender, bodies, and desires. Second, since feminism is by definition invested in changing women's social and political positions, the concept of woman on which feminism rests is mobile, not static, and thus not at risk from the kinds of plasticity that queer theory ascribes to gender (Marcus, 2005, p.200).

Thus, I call myself feministqueer because through this term I intend to include a queer perspective in my feminism. Indeed, my feminism has a postmodern queer side, or, as Barbara Mapelli¹⁸ puts it in *L'androgino tra noi* (2015, p.71), my feminism has an androgynous nature¹⁹:

Ha un'anima androgina; [quel femminismo in cui] le donne si sono ribellate e continuano a farlo contro il freno di un'identità cosiddetta scientifica, con la quale si voleva definirle, ridurle. Nella loro rivolta riprendono il loro essere androgino, la loro totalità, senza fermarsi a un'individualità spezzata²⁰.

Thereby, my feministqueer viewpoint – inclusive of the complexity of gender configurations – represents an approach of research and activism committed to defend not only female experience, but first and foremost the intersectional²¹ multiplicity of possible identifications²², beyond any

¹⁷Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender* (2004) argues for the 'plasticity of identity': "But I would suggest that more important than any presupposition about the plasticity of identity or indeed its retrograde status is queer theory's claim to be opposed to the unwanted legislation of identity" (Butler, 2004, p.7).

¹⁸Barbara Mapelli (1979) teaches pedagogy of gender differences at the University of Milan and is engaged in other pedagogical projects dealing with gender.

¹⁹Here, the term androgynous does not refer to a biological status.

²⁰"It has an androgynous soul, [the feminism in which] women rebelled and keep on doing so against a fixed identification that wants to entrap them. In their revolt they re-appropriate their androgynous side and their totality, without stopping at a maimed/partial identity" (My translation).

²¹I refer to gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, sex, sexuality and other possible axes. I have already argued that, over the course of my research, I focus principally on gender identities and relations, keeping in mind, however, the necessary links between gender and the aforementioned axes that characterize each identity: this is what I mean by intersectional approach/multiplicity. See Crenshaw (1988): intersectionality studies overlapping or *intersecting* social identities and related systems of oppression, domination or discrimination. The term was coined by the feminist scholar Kimberlee Crenshaw (1988) – moved by the need to account for multiple grounds of identity – who focussed on the effects of the intersection of gender and race in shaping the experience of the women of colour.

imposed (gender) binary. In other words, it allows me to argue for a vision of identity in its postmodern acceptation – with all its contradictions, dislocations and fragmentations²³ – with a particular focus on dissolving the impasse caused by conceptual (gender) dualisms. Broadly speaking, my feministqueer approach is committed to unsettle the (gender) binary logic, that have influenced the Western binary epistemology, historically based on Plato’s mind-matter distinction and Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction²⁴. Plato strongly influenced traditional philosophical thought by drawing upon the distinction between the mind of the knower, and matter, which has no part in the knowledge process. Principally in book IV of the *Republic*, the philosopher develops the mind-matter distinction, and from such a distinction he develops the woman-man binary. Similarly, Aristotle, in *The Metaphysics*²⁵ – an extremely influential text for Western epistemology – stresses the importance of binary distinctions, which derives from the law of non-contradiction. The binary logic he elaborates opposes a dominant subject (A) to an abject (not-A), based on the principle that defends the impossibility of being and not being at the same time: it is impossible that the same object belongs and does not belong to the same object at once (Donini, 2007). The Aristotelian doctrine thus strongly influenced Western thought by erecting hierarchical categories based on oppositions, according to which each relation is based on two opposite terms (Viano, 1974).

Therefore, the binary dualisms of mind/body, subject/object, nature/culture and man/woman have been supported by a philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Aristotle, Descartes, Husserl and Sartre²⁶. As Butler argues, “that ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchies” (Butler, 2007, p.17). Accordingly, as Genevieve Lloyd argues in *The Man of Reason* (2004), associations that oppose the male and female have their ground in the dualistic constructions of Greek philosophy that has developed hierarchies:

²² I use both the expressions ‘possibility of infinite identifications’ and ‘infinite possibilities of identification’ to refer to the multitude of possible identities that varies according to the intersections of several axes of identifications such as gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, age, and so on. This concept is strictly related to the idea of identity that I support throughout my analysis and which I take from bell hooks. Summing up her thought, identity is not something freely chosen or naturally emergent, but constructed in reaction, by difference and by opposition (hooks, 1990). Furthermore, I often use the term ‘possibility’ in reference to (gender) identities, as Judith butler does in *Undoing Gender* (2004). She explains the term thus: “Possibility is not luxury; it is as crucial as bread. I think we should not underestimate what the thought of the possible does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent. If the answer to the question, is life possible, is yes” (Butler, 2004, p.29). Accordingly, I advocate the possibility of multiple gender identifications in order to help legitimate gender complexity.

²³ Concerning postmodern identity politics, see the works of Roland Barthes (1977), Jacques Derrida (1978) and Rosi Braidotti (2011), who displace the fixity of identity.

²⁴ It is necessary to recall that both Plato and Aristotle compared mind-matter relations to those between the male and the female. “This means that the very nature of knowledge was implicitly associated with the extrusion of what was symbolically associated with the feminine” (Lloyd, 2004, p.4).

²⁵ *The Metaphysics* is a collection of fourteen treaties in which Aristotle identifies the principles of life: one of this is the principle of non-contradiction.

²⁶ See *The Man of Reason*, by Genevieve Lloyd (2004).

Maleness was aligned with active, determinate form, femaleness with passive, indeterminate matter. The scene for these alignments was set by the traditional Greek understanding of sexual reproduction, which saw the father as providing the formative principle, the real causal force of generation, whilst the mother provided only the matter which received form (Lloyd, 2004, p.3).

In addition, such a historically-determined binary has shaped our ideas of maleness and femaleness as shaped within structures of dominance – of superiority and inferiority, positive and negative, the essential and the complementary (Lloyd, 2004). Consequently, as part of the epistemological inheritance of contemporary political discourses of identity, these binaries repeat structures of dominance, as Butler points out:

This binary opposition is a strategic move within a given set of signifying practices, one that establishes the “I” in and through this opposition as a necessity, concealing the discursive apparatus by which the binary itself is constituted (Butler, 2007, p.197).

This tradition has thereby fostered the association of mind with masculinity and body with femininity, so as to perpetuate gender hierarchies. Within and against such gender asymmetry, my feministqueer approach focuses on the ‘mainstream’ gender binary, which is a product of this dualistic logic inasmuch as it opposes a male subject to a female one, without considering any other possibility either in-between or beyond the binary. Moreover, throughout my analysis, I focus on the aforementioned economy of binary oppositions as it has been required by an institutional and compulsory heterosexuality, “[which] regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term” (Butler, 2007, p.31). In sum, my feministqueer lens attempts to overcome the intellectual game of concepts and words – that often remain detached from real and relational life –, to challenge the institutional curricula²⁷ and their normative methods, and empower the transgression of imposed gender stereotypes²⁸, in order to undo the fixed gender binary and compulsory heterosexuality. It is my belief that, to transgress gender binary impositions, it is necessary first to be aware of such limitations and, for this purpose, an alternative, feministqueer educational method that moves beyond gender borders can play a decisive role.

Therefore, on the one hand, my feministqueer approach has a pedagogical aim, since it intends to move institutional curricula towards the inclusion of beyond-binary methodologies and contents; on the other hand, it has a social and political intent, aiming as it does to shake the canonical, (gender) binary and normative restrictions underlying everyday, relational life.

²⁷With the term ‘institutional curriculum’, I refer to the curriculum diffused in the Italian educational systems. Throughout my dissertation, I will mention the need to challenge the ‘institutional curricula’ as a multidisciplinary category, which represents the Italian educational system itself.

²⁸By ‘authentic stereotypes’ I mean those that secure the hierarchical stability of power relations based on a scale of hierarchical values regarding gender, sex, race, age, religion, class position and so forth. The focus of my research is to undo the gender binary through a close reading of the classical myth; alongside, here I mention gender stereotypes because I want to stress that the female/male binary is supported by stereotypical roles that oppose femininity to masculinity, so as to repeat and reconfirm the binary itself.

In questo senso l'educazione al genere diventa una sorta di prisma attraverso cui i diversi assi interpretativi ed esperienziali si intersecano, e in cui è offerta l'occasione di non appiattare le diversità, ma al contrario di ascoltarle interrogandole: svelare i modelli normativi e offrire strumenti di sovversione, dare spazio ai desideri, senza temere le contraddizioni. L'educazione al genere non è più e non solamente, dunque, dare cittadinanza educativa all'esperienza della femminilità, ma assumere la valorizzazione della complessità e della molteplicità delle esperienze dei soggetti come obiettivo principale del fare educazione e, in ultima analisi, del fare cittadinanza e democrazia (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi, 2010, p.11)²⁹.

Accordingly, by focussing primarily on undoing the gender binary³⁰, which does not do justice to the complexity of human beings, my feministqueer approach is committed first and foremost to deal with gender³¹ as “a shifting and contextual phenomenon, that does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (Butler, 2007, p.14). In other words, I aim to engage with gender plasticity and the performative³² features of gender itself:

The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body (Butler, 1999, XV).

Gender thus becomes the sphere in which it is possible to challenge the fixity, normality and stability of those categories that ideally divide humanity in two parts. In short, my project is informed by the conviction that gender is performative, inasmuch as it is not given and it does not belong to already defined bodies, rather it is a practice that achieves its several effects on bodies understood as “cultural temporal duration[s]” (Butler, 2007, p.7). Hence, following Butler in *Undoing Gender* (2004), I draw on gender as a cultural and non-permanent axis of identity, which implies the notion of performative identity as the non-linear entanglement of multiple axes.

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary [...] But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (Butler, 2004, p.1).

²⁹ “Gender education becomes a sort of prism through which several axes of identification and experience intersect one another. It allows us, moreover, to question differences without hiding them; to unveil normative models, provide tools of subversion, and give space to desire without fearing contradictions. Gender education is no longer simply about bringing feminine experience into education, but rather about acknowledging and giving value to the multiplicity and the complexity of personal experiences, which is the first aim of both education and democracy” (My translation).

³⁰ My feminism is rooted in my experience of the Italian context and therefore engages with Italian problems, deriving from the fact that gender issues are still entrapped in binary logics. For this reason, I feel the need to discuss possible ways of destabilizing the status quo.

³¹ Although I am aware of the many interlocking forces of oppression, such as gender, race, sex, sexuality, age and class – which hooks (1990) defines as the sites for systems of domination –, in this dissertation I want to focus particularly on gender issues because it is a very pressing topic in the Italian context. Regarding the term ‘gender’, it was first introduced in the scientific and politic debate in 1975 by Gayle Rubin. The anthropologist claimed, for the first time, that female/male differences are not a natural effect of the difference between bodies, but rather a consequence of social constructions. From this perspective, gender represents the social organization of sexual differences.

³² Monique Wittig's humanism clearly presupposes, along with Butler, that there is a performative construction of gender within the material practices of culture (1985).

Moreover, the performative character of gender contributes to temporal identity formations, in which gender appears as always in ongoing motion, and mutable. Once gender crosses the binary constraint, it looks vulnerable to explore the identitarian multiplicity: “it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure” (Butler, 2007, p.22). As the philosopher Mapelli puts it (2015, p.44):

[Il genere può superare l’obbligo della binarietà ed esplorare la dimensione di ciò che si presenta come permeabile]. Il genere può allora apparire come una complessità che non si rinchiude mai su se stessa, ma vive di continui rinvii e aggiornamenti, si trasforma secondo i fini che si propone e non presenta mai un’unica finalità definita e definitoria. Un percorso che insegue, narra e a sua volta influenza il divenire cangiante non solo delle identità sessuate, ma esplora soprattutto le dimensioni delle relazioni poiché le trasformazioni avvengono nel continuo rispecchiarsi tra soggetti, nell’intrecciarsi di autopercezioni³³.

In sum, I strongly believe that in Western, patriarchal, cisnormative, binary societies, gender is a form of categorization that keeps these societies under control: if you are male, you must look, act, and dress according to a certain set of rules; if you are female, you must look, act, and dress according to a different set of rules, and this system of “policing gender” is used to secure the (hetero)normative order (Butler, 1999). Regarding such expectations, Butler argues that:

The cultural matrix through which gender does not follow cannot ‘exist’ – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender. ‘Follow’ in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality (Butler, 2007, p.24).

Thus gender appears as a configuration that “exists only in relation to another, opposing relation” (Butler, 2007, p.13) and, consequently, the gender categorization and its imposed normativity set the binary. In this way, the social construction of gender not only erases possibilities outside the binary and creates compulsory categories that everyone must fit into, but oppresses those who feel they are outside this norm. Indeed, “precisely because certain kinds of ‘gender identities’ fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities” (Butler, 2007, p.24). Hence, by exploring the notion of gender, I step back and ascertain that these deeply engrained markers are not inherent to womanhood or manhood themselves, but rather socially constructed. Following Butler:

[...] Gender becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily a female one (Butler, 2007, p.9).

Accordingly, my feministqueer approach aims at deconstructing fixed gender categorizations that always operate inside a binary framework – possible attributes are always either

³³“Gender can overcome the compulsory binary and explore permeability. It can consequently appear as a complex dimension, which never closes in on itself, but rather renews itself through constant updates; acquiring several and multiple purposes. As such, gender influences not only the formation of sexual identities, but becomes also a relational category, as its transformations derive from the ongoing and mutual mirroring of individuals and in the entanglements of multiple self-perceptions” (My translation).

female or male, never neither nor both. It “establishes the need for a radical rethinking of the category of identity within the context of relations of radical gender asymmetry” (Butler, 2007, p.15). Consequently, my perspective intends to dig into the spaces ‘between and beyond’; dealing, in other words, with queer possibilities, where ‘queer’ refers to the indeterminate, the undeterminable, the non-categorized – in short, all that is mobile and unstable and that seeks to compromise normalizing social assumptions³⁴. Indeed, by relinquishing the idea of a ‘true’ and original gender, my feministqueer viewpoint addresses paradoxical and dissonant identities. I take the term ‘paradoxical identity’ from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick³⁵ (1993), who defines queer identities as paradoxical and disorienting due to their transformational power, which operates by dissolving the belief in a fixed and stable gender identity. Furthermore, I add the term ‘dissonant’ to the notion of ‘paradoxical’, as it seems to me particularly fitting in conveying the idea of identities that vibrate with their own harmonies, which clash with the normative chorus of identities entrapped within binary categories. My feministqueer ‘gaze’ is thus concerned with contesting gender as a rigid norm; moreover, it works towards stopping the violence that derives from considering gender as fixed and thus it acts for the sake of identitarian liberty. It investigates to which extent the insistence on gender differences improves the dichotomy emerging from an obliged heterosexuality, and to what extent it traps the notion of ‘gender’ in a binary and constrained logic (Mariotti, 2015)³⁶. In doing so, it moves from a celebration of identitarian differences in order to overcome the fixed oppositions that fragment and weaken society itself. In other words, my feministqueer viewpoint aims to undo the gender binary but to also reflect on the notion of identitarian possibilities in its wider complexity – in Butler’s words, “to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized” (Butler, 1999, VIII). Alongside this, it takes upon itself to transmit not already codified ideas of difference; rather, an awareness of the multitude of differences that attempt to resist incorporation and appropriation within the social and political binary norm:

Le differenze come passaggio fondativo per la comprensione della contemporaneità in cui viviamo, come pratica di risoluzione, rispetto e valorizzazione per affrontare la complessità che ci circonda. Materia seria di studio e riflessione, di prese di posizione politiche per rendere

³⁴From the ‘Introduction to Judith Butler’, *Fare e disfare il genere* Zappino F. ed.: “Queer ovvero indeterminato, indeterminabile, non catalogabile all’interno di griglie precise, ma essenzialmente mobile, instabile nella misura in cui si cerca di mettere radicalmente in questione gli assunti normalizzanti in vigore all’interno della società” (2014, p.26). I will further analyse this term in the third chapter.

³⁵Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick (1950-2009) was an academic working in the field of Gender, Queer Studies and Critical Theory.

³⁶“L’insistenza sulle differenze non alimenta forse la dicotomia della eterosessualità obbligata? Non chiude i generi in una logica binaria e costrittiva?” (Mariotti, 2015, p.103).

possibile la partecipazione democratica dei soggetti non assimilati a modelli univoci [...] (Mapelli, 2015, p.35)³⁷.

Hence, by refusing to be entrapped within closed and anti-democratic identifications, my feministqueer attitude performs the attempt to start not from a female/male binary, but rather from an attempt to problematize this model in the name of a wider inclusive totality and through a pedagogy of difference³⁸. Consequently, I propose a feministqueer reading approach which includes non-binary and non-normative differences, allowing me to reflect on the notion of 'queerness'³⁹, which I will explain below. Indeed, as I will elaborate in the third chapter, I am especially determined to provoke discussion on the notion of queer identity as unfixed, floating and changeable, as well as multiple, non-conformist, dissident to normalized attitudes, anti-institutional and beyond all binaries. Exploring this queer identity by reading classic myths represents for me a radical project of resistance, which offers a 'beyond binary' language and makes subjects conceivable as whole in their multiple selves. In other words, as Butler argues "the limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (Butler, 2007, p.12). Accordingly, to break those binary constraints means to open space for alternative possibilities. Thus, moving away from gender binary identifications, the queer identity attempts to overcome the binary: by being socially considered a damaging 'other', it addresses every identity that exists in opposition to the norm, transgressing normative roles in the name of self-recognition. I find the definition of 'queer' given by Sedgwick very inspiring:

[Queer refers to] the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, laps and excess of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically (Sedgwick, 1993, p.7).

A queer perspective is thus attentive to gaps and resistances "it is the place where questions of identity arise more originally, and most relationally" (Sedgwick, 1995, p.239). It mirrors an identity that can never define a stable self; rather, it can only disturb fixed ones in order to claim open possibilities. Sedgwick also adds that queer is a politically potent term which is an inexhaustible source of transformational energy that dissolves the differences (1995). As a

³⁷"Difference is a fundamental step in the comprehension of life; it allows us to practice resolution, respect and valorisation, helping to face the complexity around us. Difference is a serious subject matter that should be studied and reflected on; it encourages strong political standpoints that allow the democratic participation of non-normatively conformed identities" (My translation).

³⁸ This is an umbrella term that combines both feminist pedagogy and queer pedagogy. I will further explain the notion of 'pedagogy of difference' in the third chapter.

³⁹According to Marcus, even though the term 'queer' was firstly used as an alternative to lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender, it also emphasizes affinity and solidarity over identity. In my project, "I use queer to refer to this deliberately loose, inclusive association" (Marcus, 2005, p.196). Thus, by foregrounding the idea of sexual identity as flexible and unstable, the term 'queer' refers to those identities that destabilize the norms. Indeed, by expanding the range of visible, plausible and liveable sexualities, queer studies expand the meaning of woman and man and more generally, the notion of identity.

consequence, a queer project is always a force on the move, refusing to constrict meanings but rather finding its potential from such refusal.

In sum, given that institutional educational practices have often sexualized and gendered many fields of knowledge, in examining the affective role of education through classical myths, I aspire to be a feministqueer. Such a combination of positions allows me to scratch out the surface of normalized representations and accepted stereotypes, in order to explore what lies beneath these institutionalized interpretations. By being a feministqueer, I aim particularly to shed light on the exigency of teaching gender possibilities through revised methods of knowledge transmission within normative institutions. In other words, by attempting to stress gender possibilities through an alternative method of reading myths, I bring up a reflection on the transformative potential of gender and the multiplicity of gender identifications, so as to challenge the dominant (hetero) normative order. This feministqueer method allows me to break the borders between acceptable and abject, so as to offer an analysis that includes differences. Consequently, being a feministqueer researcher allows me to queer knowledge at an educational level and fight for the political recognition of gender non-conformed identities, which is especially urgent in my country.

1.3 Situating my research in the Italian context

Having described my position as a feministqueer researcher, in this section I ‘situate’ my research. I choose to locate my project explicitly, in the wake of the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire⁴⁰ (1971), who repeatedly states that any pedagogical method cannot simply be transferred to other settings, but each historical and spatial site requires the development of a pedagogy appropriate to that setting. For this reason, in the following, I identify my educational project as grounded in the Italian social context I come from. Indeed, this research is rooted in my educational, relational and political context: my academic experience in school and university, as a middle-class, white, female and cis-gender student of Classics and Gender Studies in Italy, has fed my reflections on the educational system and the political exigency to read myths differently in this context.

Thus, I need to look back at the institutionalized education I received, in order to articulate the feministqueer approach to education I believe is necessary. Indeed, my experience of learning strategies – and especially of methods of reading myths in both secondary school and university – was heteronormative, hegemonic, patriarchal, stereotypical and centered on the (gender) binary.

⁴⁰ Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator and founder of critical pedagogy. He is best known for his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971), still considered one of the paramount works of critical pedagogy. He elaborates on philosophy of education derived not only from traditional methodologies but also from Marxist and anti-colonialist theories. His main contribution consisted in finding educational possibilities to free people from oppression and their oppressors.

Such a normative framework is essentially based on the Western dominant logic of binary hierarchical relations, which I discussed in the previous chapter, and for this reason, it has pushed me to ask myself how to overcome such a binary and separatist logic, if not by starting from those learning sites and sources in which the binary stereotypes are grounded. In trying to find an answer, the lack of an inclusive and non-binary experience able to disturb conventions; and, furthermore, the impossibility of transgressing the socially-constructed boundaries that neatly oppose the masculine – namely, the Self, the knower, reason, the public sphere, culture – to the feminine – namely, the Other, the known, the private sphere and nature – (Lloyd, 2004) had a decisive influence on my commitment to creating a new educational strategy. In other words, the aforementioned reasons stimulated my interest in the conception of an inclusive and ‘beyond binary’ practice, through the feministqueer reading method.

I focus especially on classical myth as a potential medium to bring in non-binary gender issues into the school system, because classical myths play an important part in the Italian *curricula*, from primary throughout secondary school. Classical myths have a fundamental pedagogical role in the Italian educational context, since ancient Greek culture was extremely influential in the formation of the Italian language, art, culture and politics: “the work of myths regarded as the basic structures of the creative imagination of the Mediterranean culture lays down their vital continuum in all epochs of development of culture until the present day” (Budzowska, Czerwinska 2015, p.9). For this reason, Italian *curricula* employ myths as a learning tool: in primary school, to stimulate children’s imagination; in secondary school, as a means to reflect on political, social and moral issues.

Therefore, in line with my interdisciplinary studies, the feministqueer practice of reading myths that I propose has a twofold educational intent: on the one hand, it aims to educate readers of classics using feministqueer theories; on the other, it intends to introduce them to feminismqueer via the myths themselves: thus, in my close reading practice, my feministqueer approach becomes both an instrument towards gaining critical knowledge and the object of the learning process itself. Indeed, in the practice of reading classics, feministqueer theories are both a means to derive knowledge from myths and a form of knowledge in themselves, which can be transmitted through myths. Thus, I propose to read classical myths through a feministqueer gaze, in order to incentivize alternative knowledge throughout a medium as popular as myth. My choice to advocate a similar educational process is justified by the awareness of a gap in my own education, which I could compensate only by turning back to the texts I previously worked on, but with a more critical gaze: by looking backwards, I recognize the partial, normative, patriarchal, heterosexual and binary perspective from where, as a student, I was taught to see and read the world. Even though I have

always been fascinated by the potential force of myth, I could only begin to sense it, because in the classrooms I frequented, non-normative possibilities of reading myths were not even thinkable. In my experience, school was the place where one was taught obedience and normative ways of living; a place of confinement rather than a site for discovering possibilities. In school, I was bombarded with binary images and messages and trained to adopt a binary view and language, in order to contribute to the maintenance of the (gender) binary system and the equilibrium of its powers. Accordingly, in such a normative environment, I read Sophocles' *Antigone* solely from an unquestionable, binary, canonical and patriarchal perspective. As a fifteen-year-old female student, the character of Antigone spoke to me intellectually and emotionally, but first and foremost she incremented my struggles. Unfortunately, since I was so influenced by a binary perspective, the heroine's potential remained hidden to me for too long. Despite this, Antigone with her own strong but fluctuating identity, has continued to speak to me.

Due to my intimate connection with the myth of Antigone, when I approached Gender Studies with a literary interest, I immediately found myself imagining ways to read the myth of Antigone from my feministqueer, intersectional and inclusive perspective. In doing so, I was moved by the strong belief that if we can shift our viewpoint and see that sex, gender and identities are more fluid than we have been taught, then the wide breadth of gender identities can be perceived as enriching: "I wanted to become a critical thinker" (hooks, 1994, p.5). Thus, my project of 'dragging'⁴¹ Antigone aims at the fulfillment of a past desire – in line with a tendency that Sedgwick points out in many works:

I think many adults (and I am among them) are trying, in our work, to keep faith with vividly remembered promises made to ourselves in childhood: promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled [...] (Sedgwick, 1993, p.3).

Hence, in my work I seek to satisfy the yearning for a different kind of reading that I harboured in secondary school and during my undergraduate studies, one that would allow me to unveil and queer the latent parts of the myth itself. Indeed, even though my academic and socio-political experiences have spurred my activism, Antigone is still there, ready to cross threshold of 'acceptability' and to express her desire to become visible⁴². By engaging with the myth, I have realized that my devotion to learning and to queering my reading is a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist normalizing strategies, beginning from what I have experienced directly. For this reason, and since I really believe in the potential of literary texts as tools for developing

⁴¹I will clarify the verb 'to drag' in the last chapter. It is sufficient to say, here, that I use the expression 'dragging Antigone' in reference to my intention of queering my gaze in analysing Antigone's myth.

⁴²Here I refer again to the previous quote from Sedgwick, but I also implicitly refer to Antigone's desire of her brother, as I will clarify in the last chapter.

critical and active thought, I feel the need to return to my passion for classic literature with a feministqueer awareness, so as to make the mythical text a site for political struggles. This project thus originates from the convergence of my various experiences: this interconnection made me aware of a giant social and political lack in the Italian educational system. Put differently, the training I received in reading classical myths encouraged me to think critically and made me aware of the extent to which institutional education aims at producing normative knowledge, fully entrapped in partial and canonical boundaries that sustain the current socio-political order. In this manner, on the one hand, my personal experience heightened my awareness of the intersection between educational practices and binary and heteronormative patriarchy; on the other, it spurred me to propose an inclusive and transgressive form of knowledge for a more just society (hooks, 1994). In this respect, similarly to Patty Lather, I advocate a kind of research committed to justice, basing this on two assumptions:

First, we are in a postpositivist period in the human sciences, a period marked by much methodological and epistemological fragmentation. There has been, however, little exploration of the methodological implications of the search for an emancipatory social science. Such social science would allow us not only to understand the mal distribution of power and resources underlying our society but also to change that mal distribution in ways that help create a more equal world. My second argument is that research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society – that is, research as praxis – adds an important voice to that ferment (Lather, 1991, p.51).

Accordingly, I commit my research to the production of knowledge that could have influential effects in terms of the destabilization of gender hierarchies. Simultaneously, I commit myself to raising awareness for the sake of doing justice to the complexity and indeterminacy of most human experiences and identities. Coherently with such broad goals, in what follows, I clearly point out the purposes of my ‘pedagogical transgressing project’.

2. *Second Episode.*

Methodological Framework

The first chapter has an introductory function, serving as it does the purpose of symbolically setting the scene of my play: in it, I situated myself as a feministqueer researcher, then underscored the potential of knowledge produced through personal experience and, finally, I localized my project in the Italian educational context I belong to. More precisely, moved by a deep interest in classical literature and, above all, by the desire to engage with classical myths using a different method from the one I was taught in school – one deriving from a normative, patriarchal and binary perspective – , in the first chapter, I justified my need to come up with a reading method which, using myths as a pedagogical medium, might move beyond (gender) binary knowledge. Therefore, after having placed the actors on stage – my experience, my feministqueer position and the Italian context – in what follows, I will outline the methodological framework of my dissertation. Firstly, I will present the aims of my project; secondly, the methodologies I will use and, finally, I will elaborate on the feministqueer reading method of critically engaging with classical myths. The feministqueer reading method I will develop in this chapter *in primis* aims to break down the gender binary and (hetero)normativity as compulsory constructions. In the last part of this chapter, I will provide guidelines to such a method, that I will then put into practice in reading Anne Carson's *Antigonick* in the last chapter.

2.1 From the personal to the political: research aims

Before elaborating on the methodology and methods of my dissertation, I will point out the principal aims of my research. In so doing, I link theory and practice, on one hand, and the personal and the political on the other. Broadly speaking, I identify the aims of my research as simultaneously private and public. Indeed, this project emerges from my belief that we all should behave – in line with personal experiences and strengths – as if it were possible to change the world; it stems from my will to construct my own identity in resistance to dominant (gender) constrictions. It thus attempts to answer Butler's question (2007, p.37): "What possibility exists for the disruption of the oppositional binary itself?" In particular, it tends to do so by focusing on the importance of personal education as a tool to transform the relations of domination, based especially on gender. In other words, my research attempts to offer a possibility for the displacement of the binary through alternative educational methods. Indeed, as the scholar and

activist Angela Davis argued: schools and academia should be the places producing knowledge to change the world⁴³. In the wake of such an inspiring thought, in this research I seek to depart from the page and move towards the relational world, by stating that critical, engaged and feministqueer educational methods provide the language and tools necessary to link knowledge production with social development. This project originates from my refusal to agree with institutional and (hetero) normative knowledge and methods; it is an attempt to break the hegemonic relationship between education and social control that aims at forging compliant citizens.

Furthermore, it develops from my will to make sense of the multiplicity and changeability of possible identities; from my commitment to intervene critically in the pedagogical system grounding thinkers, with a special attention to (gender) identitarian possibilities. Put differently, this research derives from my attempt to queer educational practices in order to break the (gender) binary and thus to foster the freedom of self-identification. For all these reasons, I start from myself, in order to bring together my academic experience and my activism. My project is empirical and practical, since it is rooted in my experience of reading myths and aims to foreground transformations starting from questions of gender and identity surrounding the figure of Antigone. More precisely, in my research, I intend to create a feministqueer method for reading myths as a strategy to undo the binary patterns and to develop critical consciousness through an alternative reading method. Alongside this, the feministqueer method I create represents a means to engage with ‘the literary matter’ beyond the binary, and consequently to intervene in one’s own surroundings, through the interaction with myths.

Here I merge my need of political commitment as an active researcher and my frustrating experience in reading classical myths. At a personal level, this research originates from my need to question what has remained unquestioned for years, and actualize Antigone’s struggle to speak aloud. Furthermore, it derives from my own struggle to distance myself from the patriarchal, heteronormative, hegemonic and binary perspective that stopped me from rethinking and theorizing new social and ethical interpretations of Antigone’s myth. At a political level, this project advocates a feministqueer and engaged awareness, via a critical reading method. In this respect, I have put much thought into how best to be accountable in this thesis. Finally, I think that my accountability concerns the creation of a feministqueer method of reading myths as an instrument to explore ways of reading beyond the gender binary and beyond the traditional, heterocentric readings.

My project deals in particular with Antigone, but the tools I aim to offer can be employed in approaching other classical myths. For me, this represents a way, on one hand, to produce

⁴³ Lecture held by Angela Davis at the University of Bologna on the 16th of March 2016.

knowledge that transgresses the normalcy⁴⁴ imposed by institutional readings; on the other, to undo the gender binary and the (hetero)normative and normalizing way of thinking. Broadly speaking, to break the (gender) binary and to give rise to emancipatory knowledge through a feministqueer method – working on texts that are already central in Italian curricula – is the main purpose of my research:

Emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social process (Lather, 1991, p.52).

Emancipatory and transgressive knowledge – those forms of knowledge which do not enclose every identity within the female/male dichotomy – opens minds to the possibilities that everyday language and life keep hidden or unquestioned. As such, empowering knowledge represents a socially constituted and self-embedded knowledge, which emancipates learners and empowers citizens. Put differently, I consider people as autonomous beings who have the right to generate knowledge about themselves, and this right protects them from being managed and manipulated. Accordingly, in producing empowering knowledge there must always be a commitment to social development that is somehow subversive of the institutional order:

Doing research on persons involves an important educational commitment: to provide conditions under which subjects can enhance their capacity for self-determination in acquiring knowledge about the human condition (Heron, 1981, pp.34-35).

Thus, emancipatory and empowering knowledge turns out to be transformative inasmuch as it intends to transgress the ‘normal’ methods of knowledge production. In such a transformation, my purpose is *in primis* to rid the classic curricula of the female/male binary theories that inform them, and which teach to refuse inclusiveness and to exclude any identifications beyond the dualistic (gender) category. Accordingly, I advocate a transforming method – that is, means of producing knowledge –, which can also transform the social *logos* in terms of openness to (gender) differences and multiplicity.

Con ‘sapere trasformativo’ intendiamo che la lettura di genere delle discipline deve saper arrivare al fondamento stesso del pensiero occidentale smascherando come esso si sia costruito a partire dalla negazione delle differenze e dei molteplici modi del conoscere: la struttura gerarchica delle differenze – prima fra tutte quella maschile vs. femminile e quella mente vs. corpo – rappresenta infatti un aspetto connaturato all’elaborazione stessa del *logos* (l’ordine del

⁴⁴ I will explain this term in the third chapter. In particular, I will explore the notion of normalcy in line with Sedgwick’s *Christmas Effects*, when institutions speak “with one voice” (1993, p.5). This effect can be extended in order to comprehend how a similar, natural monolith has been built around our expectations regarding gender, sex and sexuality: “you should have a sex, and it must be male or female; your gender assignment must correspond to your sex; your sexual fantasies and desires should be congruent with your sexual practices; and you should know the sex and gender assignment of the object of your desire (assumed to be the opposite of yourself)” (Smith, 2013, p.469). Thus, broadly speaking, I use this term to define normative knowledge, identities and behaviours. More precisely, in my analysis I use ‘normalcy’ to indicate the socially constructed norm – what used to be considered as ‘natural’ – that defines our gender, sex and sexuality: an entanglement of naturalized alignments imposed on our lives.

discorso) e del funzionamento dicotomico del pensiero e della scienza occidentale (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi, 2010, p.24)⁴⁵.

Hence, as I will demonstrate in the last chapter, using Anne Carson's *Antigonick*, an alternative, feministqueer gaze can draw transforming knowledge from institutional materials. In particular, through the feministqueer reading method, I aim to free the heroine's identity, in order to go beyond binary-entrapped readings: I locate Antigone in an alleged 'queer contemporaneity'. In so doing, I seek to push the reader's imagination beyond female/male boundaries, freeing the play's protagonist from the (hetero)normative⁴⁶ chain. Broadly speaking, as Sedgwick claims (1995, p.239), I attempt to suggest "an alternative and fundamentally interrogative way of being in the world, a way that is all but forgotten amid the complacent everydayness of hetero-sexual self-identification". In so doing, I give readers the methodological tools to reflect on the gender binary stereotypes via an engaged reading praxis, so as to be able to develop a feministqueer, critical thought, and to grow into emancipated and aware thinkers.

In other words, I intend to promote a necessary methodological intervention via the practice of reading myths: this dissertation intends to be a practical example of how to return to classical myths in order to move from the reformulation of reading methods towards a social transformation, through a feministqueer gaze. In particular, by situating my research in the Italian political, educational and cultural context, I defend the multiplicity of (gender) identities and the un-fixed and transgressive identitarian possibilities. I intend to apply to contemporary curricula an inclusive feministqueer method of reading, which is a mode of thinking and acting that encourages inclusive knowledge and may eventually foster the transformation of standardized ways of thinking. Indeed, following the philosopher Michela Marzano, I think that this is exactly the basis for a social rebirth: "nessuna azione politica realmente inclusiva di tutte le differenze sarà mai possibile fino a quando si partirà da concetti fissi, dati e immutabili di identità"(2015, p.48)⁴⁷.

Accordingly, this research aims at challenging the normative and gendered way of looking at myths and of making the past representations a possible means to develop inclusive and transformative knowledge on gender. Reading classical myths from my feministqueer perspective is a method to push limits and to disturb the acceptable politics of representations. My writing style deliberately mirrors what reading myths from a feministqueer perspective entails: by starting from my personal experience, and the resistances I went through during my education, I interweave

⁴⁵ "By 'transformative knowledge', we mean that gender reading must reach the basis of Western thought, and reveal how it has developed by denying difference and refusing to acknowledge multiple forms of knowledge. The hierarchic structure of differences – above all, feminine vs. masculine and mind vs. body – represents an aspect of the logos itself and of the dichotomic functioning of both Western thought and science" (My translation).

⁴⁶ In this respect, Butler (2007, p.31) argues that: "The institution of compulsory heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary".

⁴⁷ "No political action inclusive of differences will be possible if we harbour notions of fixed, immutable and stable identities" (My translation).

theory and practice, reflection and action, to rework those resistances and, consequently, to catalyze a conscientization, which leads to the awakening of critical awareness. More generally, with this project I aim to add my voice to a collective call for renewal in education methods, especially with regards to the notion of gender. Borrowing hooks' words (1994), this project urges all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the borders of what is acceptable, so that we can think, rethink, and create new visions beyond the imposed boundaries. This movement makes the feministqueer method of reading myths an educational practice of liberty; a practice which helps the learner/reader think beyond normative and binary constraints. With my work, I want to stress the need, in the Italian education system, to develop new methods which take into account the variety of possibilities concerning (gender) identities: I think that only by discussing and raising awareness of identitarian differences and multiplicity will the school system contribute to creating conscious citizens and thus bringing about social transformations.

As an aspirant feministqueer researcher, my responsibility lays in offering methodological tools to transform the education system, so that schools can become places where difference is embraced and inclusive, intersectional and anti-normative thinking encouraged. More precisely, as an aspirant feministqueer researcher with a background in Classics, I am committed to intervene in the education system in order to trigger a transformation in the dominant modes of thinking through the practice of reading myths. Consequently, my commitment to an active, inclusive, feministqueer education is in itself a political intervention and challenge to normative patterns. Indeed, schools teach people to think, so that the way one has learnt to think at school influences their personal, social and political life. As hooks (1994, p.117) puts it: "once you learn to look at yourself critically, you look at everything around you with new eyes". For this reason, I highlight the exigency for an experience-based learning, which opens pupils' minds with regards to issues of gender, sex, sexuality and other identitarian differences. A similarly self-engaged education, training people to be self-aware, frees them from patriarchal, heterosexual and normative biases: in such a way, feminist and queer pedagogies can bring about liberating change. By suggesting methodological instruments useful in widening the breadth of the reader's imagination, the practice of reading into the interlocked possibilities latent in myths, once moved beyond the binary, opens up to embrace the infinite multitude of possible identities.

2.2 Standpoint epistemology and diffraction

In this section I discuss the methodological framework of my project: I clarify my epistemological starting point, and the methodologies and method I engage with. As already argued, this project

stems from my situated experience, thus the acts of localizing and profiling play a central role in the method I will outline. Thus, in order to give a methodological solidity to experience itself, it becomes necessary to introduce standpoint epistemology⁴⁸ and particularly the function of ‘siting’:

‘Siting’ implies the methodological demand that the researcher subject must reflect on her or his position in term of time, space, body and history, and in terms of the context of intersecting power differentials in which she or he is inscribed (Lykke, 2010, p.152).

Taking the contextualization and profiling of myself as a researcher as the epistemological principle of my work implies an urgent need to reflect on how I am embedded in the fabric of multiple and intersecting power outsets, and to analyze how to develop critical actions in such an intersecting frame. To support my methodology, I quote Donna Haraway⁴⁹, referring to the standpoint epistemology she elaborates, as an epistemology based on a partial perspective. Indeed, standpoint epistemology sees objectivity as a grounded partial perspective, which makes the subject accountable for what they learn from a partial location: only partial perspectives promise objective visions (Braidotti, 2011). I borrow this concept as the one that develops among a mobile multiplicity of critical localizations, in one’s situated perspective, without running the risk of becoming relativistic. Indeed, standpoint epistemology takes into account the fact that one’s outlook derives from one’s own body, implying a necessarily complex web of experiences, and is never, therefore, a view from above or from nowhere. Despite such an embodied idea of knowledge – as deriving from one’s own experience – this ‘local knowledge’ (Haraway, 1988) resonates with global sounds from the outside, being a practice of objectivity:

So I want to argue for a practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing (Haraway, 1988, p.585).

Thus, in accordance with Haraway, not universal but rather situated experience guides my project: epistemology of location, situated knowledge and positioning – where partiality is the condition for one’s voice to be heard – provide the bases for critical and embodied claims. In other words, I attempt to debunk the myths of universality, uncovering the particularity, the vulnerability

⁴⁸Feminist standpoint theory derives from a Marxist development of the idea of the standpoint of the proletariat. Feminist theorists and sociologists, such as Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway and others, reframed the Marxist idea, in order to make space for a feminist standpoint. Their principle claim regards the need to start from the situated position of women in order to move towards inclusive actions. On the subject, Harding argues that “starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives but also of men’s lives and of the whole social order” (1993, p.56). According to feminist standpoint theorists, the process of achieving knowledge begins when standpoints emerge through the experience of marginalized lives. In other terms, standpoint theory considers women’s personal experience the best place to begin an enquiry. I think that the force of this epistemology regards the recognition of women’s presence in many different forms and this multiplicity becomes a terrain of socio-political research. In my analysis of standpoint epistemology, I primarily consider Donna Haraway’s assumptions in “Situated Knowledge” (1989), using this kind of epistemology based on personal experience.

⁴⁹ Donna Haraway (1944) is an activist and feminist scholar in the department of Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, United States.

and the contingency of one's own knowledge's production (Lather, 1991). As a consequence, my style and my whole project is based, as I have noted, on the politics of location⁵⁰, and I see this style and this attempt to start from 'my location' as an important step in the process of constituting a feministqueer methodological discourse as a political practice, which is both a sort of counter narrative and a space of resistance. Thus, following Haraway, I call for a feministqueer reading of myths that can embrace: "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves" (1988, p.587). Moreover, from such a position, I call for a form of knowledge which can reflect my feministqueer standpoint and undermine the universal and objective truth that surrounds the interpretations of myths. Hence, my analysis is situated in my critical cultural practices in a way that refuses Self/Other, female/male dichotomies and also the linear, horizontal relation among the knower and the known (Haraway, 1988). In addition, according to Haraway's standpoint theory, the feministqueer reading process I will put into practice in the last chapter subverts the communal process of knowledge meant as a hierarchical relation among the active knower and the known, namely the passive object: the reading methodology I will engage with overturns such a logic, according to Haraway's (1988) explanation of knowledge as a relation among two interacting agents. Situated in my experience, my research intends to denounce the (gender) binary logic as a universal given and recognize the contingency and partiality of knowledge: "my work also interrogates the notion of prescription and recognizes the contingency and indeterminacy of meanings" (Solomon-Godeau, 1988, p.210).

Alongside this, my other main methodological approach is diffractive reading. A foundational concept used both by Haraway and Karen Barad⁵¹ (2014) and understood as an alternative methodology to critical reflection, diffraction refers to the figurations produced when waves – light, sound, water – touch an obstacle and spread out. The resultant interference pattern, rather than being read only along the trajectories of traditional thinking – as an obstacle for accessing the true and original wave – can be read differently to see what happens when those waves meet and interact.

So I use it [the optical concept 'diffraction'] to talk about making a difference in the world as opposed to just being endlessly self-reflective. Obviously, I am not against being self-reflective, but I am interested in foregrounding something else (Haraway, 2000, p.104).

Diffraction is a metaphorical term, the opposite of reflection: reflective methodology implies looking in the mirror, as a critical tool; instead, diffractive methodology implies looking through the *speculum* as a critical tool. Both actions refer to a reflection; to explain this concept, I borrow the

⁵⁰ For a longer explanation, see 'Notes toward a Politics of Location' by Adrian Rich (1984).

notion of *speculum* as the mirror's opposite, as explained by Luce Irigaray⁵² in *Speculum of the other Woman* (1989). On the one hand, the mirror reflects more or less exactly the image in front of it, except alterations and differential possibilities; as a consequence, the act of mirroring reproduces images without any possible modification. On the other hand, the *speculum* – which Irigaray speaks of in relation to sexual difference – is the concave instrument used by gynecologists, which provides an image of the uterus' structure that is not perfectly defined, but rather composed of shadows and deformations without fixed or stable limits. Hence, the *speculum* metaphor – once moved away from sexual difference issues towards difference in a broader sense – becomes useful in understanding the multiplicity of possibilities beyond a dualistic system that reproduces any 'other' pattern as a copy of the first, the supposed 'self'.

Therefore, looking in the mirror does not push the researcher beyond the static insights of normalcy: no new patterns appear; rather, a mere luminous reflection forms a fixed and immobile image that reproduces the original. In contrast to reflection, diffraction is a dynamic and fluid process that continuously creates new patterns of differences and alternative possibilities: the diffracted image is alternative to the supposed original. In addition, it is important not only to think of the instrument reproducing the images, but also to consider the person looking, the reader's eyes engaged in the vision. Indeed, as Haraway (1988, p.583) points out, vision is not a passive reflection: "all eyes, included our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translation and specific ways of seeing – that is ways of life"; therefore, any critical gaze may enact a diffractive reading.

New materialist and philosopher of science Iris van der Tuin (2011) gives a more detailed analysis of what diffractive reading is: it is an active way of engaging with a text, one that "does not allow for leaving a text untouched, and requires a text's reader to engage with the transformation" (2011, p.23). In other words, diffractive reading is a creative way of interfering with a text that can reveal the inherent nonlinearity of reading, its temporality and its space of validity. In this respect, one or more texts can be read diffractively according to the contingent relationship among the texts and the reader, and the time and space. Thus, it is an interaction with the text that engenders a

⁵² Luce Irigaray (1930) – among others: Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva – is a French poststructuralist feminist theorist who supports the model of sexual difference, which believed in a sexualized opposition between femininity and masculinity. Here, I propose to borrow the image of the *speculum*, used by the French feminist philosopher, to clarify the feministqueer diffractive approach to reading. Indeed, Irigaray's *speculum* is an instrument that gives back an image that is not perfectly similar to the supposed first and real one; rather, it is a tool that produces a representation, the blurred 'other' of the supposed original. It is an instrument that erases hierarchical scales of value, since it does not imply an original and a copy, but rather two different images. Accordingly, the *speculum* trope – along with the impossibility of recreating the same pattern – is useful for my analysis. Indeed, the theme of equality is widely debated both in Irigaray's work and in queer theory: on one hand, queer theorists fear that equality will be the death of difference because it will force minorities to adapt themselves to a norm that has been formulated to exclude them (Warner, 1993). On the other, since the '80s, Irigaray has focussed her investigations on sexual difference. In conclusion, I think that the *speculum* is a fitting symbol of the queer reading method of diffraction.

nonlinear and non-mirroring analysis; it is a way to interfere with the text by considering the fact that the patriarchal and phallogocentric⁵³ analysis is not the only one possible.

In this sense, considering my situated experience of normatively reading myths, I see reflexive methodology as supportive of normalcy-related issues; namely, those reflecting the hegemonic, normative and binary system in a traditional and classic mode. Instead, a diffractive analysis is able to create new, ever-changing and deformed patterns and images without defined borders. For this reason, by looking back at my own education – which mirrors the normative and dominant system of power relations – I want to interrogate the image created by a diffractive lens through the interaction between the contingency of the reader's life and the text. Hence, in much the same way as Haraway and Barad, I will use this methodological framework to create an alternative and diffractive feministqueer reading method; namely, grounding my work in this methodology, I provide new tools to read myths from a diffractive and situated perspective. Furthermore, I propose to employ the diffractive, analytical methodology to challenge the reflective system of 'reading a classical myth'. Such exercise emphasizes the necessity to rethink the way of reading the world and its relations, by reconsidering the solid and monolithic roots in which normative education is grounded. Furthermore, I want to rethink the process of reading myths in order to deconstruct the certainties that have guided my learning of classical myths. Thus, the methodology of diffraction allows "un'operazione che potrei definire di revisione e di pulizia intellettuale che spero mi consenta di restituire ai miei pensieri maggiore pienezza" (Mapelli, 2015, p.12)⁵⁴. In particular, I reorganize things intellectually by putting my educational experience under scrutiny and by proposing a situated and diffractive practice of reading myths, which is necessarily temporal and partial.

Therefore, I seek to encourage a cultural intervention, by creating a reading method different from that imposed by the institutional and universalizing education system; rather, I foster a type of knowledge characterized by partial sight, but nevertheless open to new interpretations and connections among individuals. Following Haraway (1988, p.590), "the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular"; accordingly, by grounding myself in my memory of hegemonic methodological practices of learning, I break the boundaries of the personal, moving towards a wider pedagogical and methodological formulation, which underscores the socio-political exigency to transform the way of forming minds.

In so doing, I take as my epistemological starting point the deconstruction of fixed categories into an array of changeable, in-between spaces, transformations, excesses, multiple

⁵³Term used by Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the other Woman* (1989), to refer to the masculine *logos* as an expression of his own phallogocentrism.

⁵⁴ "An operation that I could call an act of revising and cleaning, which I hope will allow me to give my thoughts greater plenitude" (My translation).

identities and mobile positionings. On the one hand, my epistemological position is aimed at deconstructing universalizing and normative narratives developed around classical myths, focusing, in particular, on undoing the gender binary frames; on the other, my situated knowledge is committed to a critical transgression of the political boundaries that normalize and restrict identitarian positions within fixed and compulsory constrictions. As Sandra Harding states in “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is ‘Strong Objectivity?’” (1992), there is a direct and inverse connection between politics and the production of knowledge:

Standpoint epistemology sets the relationships between knowledge and politics at the center of its account in the sense that it tries to provide casual accounts – to explain – the effects that different kinds of politics have on the production of knowledge (Harding, 1992, p.56).

Accordingly, my feministqueer approach to reading myths intends to foster a socio-political transformation that comes from a new awareness of the multiplicity of gender identifications, beyond the imposed binary. In short, moving from my personal standpoint towards partial objectivity, my feministqueer epistemological position attempts to engender a transformation of knowledge production in schools, by undoing and reconsidering the either-or, patriarchal and reflective method of reading myths. In this respect, as far as my close reading of *Antigonick* is concerned (see chapter four), I aim at approaching the myth of Antigone through a *speculum*, with my diffractive feministqueer gaze: a similar practice does not reproduce an assertive and reflective mirror-image; rather, it offers faded representations of Antigone which bring up alternative insights, situated beyond imposed boundaries. Thus, through my feministqueer reading of *Antigonick*, I offer a practical and experiential demonstration of what a situated, diffractive and feministqueer reading method might engender.

2.3 Close reading: a feministqueer method

In the following section, I aim to provide guidelines for a feministqueer close reading. My project can thus be seen as an empirical actualization of a new reading practice: I create a method of interpretation for the diffractive and situated analysis⁵⁵ of classical myths and I will put it into practice in reading Carson’s *Antigonick*. In particular, I propose a type of close reading based on a feministqueer method, which opens new possibilities both at an interpretative level and at an identitarian one. The feministqueer close reading technique I develop here derives from traditional-poststructuralist close reading strategies, but modifies, reinforces and renews them, especially by adapting the practice of close reading to Gender Studies’ methodological claims. However, feminist

⁵⁵ In this paragraph, I describe close reading as a feministqueer praxis. I will return to this praxis by putting it into practice in the last chapter, in which I analyse Anne Carson’s *Antigonick*.

close reading shares with the methods of close reading advocated by New Criticism the fact that “[it] attempts to identify ambiguity, irony, and paradox as different levels at which text signaled tensions within the structure” (Quayson, 2005, p.122). Once more, as Ato Quayson argues (2005), close reading – as theorized by New Criticism and deconstructuralism – helps to understand not only literary structure but also society at large. My feministqueer reading process thus seeks to identify the specific configurations and implications of the heterogeneities coming together in each text and, broadly speaking, in each identity. In other words, the feministqueer close reading method I explore allows the reader to form a link between the text and one’s social context. In her 2007 volume *Reading in Detail*, Naomi Schor proposes a version of close reading which unites deconstruction and feminist aesthetics, rooted in oppositional reading. In my opinion, close reading as a method of interpretation represents a very useful tool for developing a feministqueer analysis, which intends to foreground differences – not necessarily oppositional ones – that are important for feminist thought, especially concerning the multitude of possible identities. Broadly speaking, the feministqueer reading I am outlining deals with the situated, the temporal, the partial, the resistant, the creative, the critical and the engaged.

Before analyzing the relations between these definitions and the act of reading, I want to clarify what I mean by ‘feministqueer close reading’: I refer to a reading method situated against the grain due to its attempt to fracture the canonicity implicit in patriarchal, heteronormative, normalcy-based and binary discourses. It is a subversive practice that challenges conventions of reading, while demanding new possibilities of reading: “subversive practices have to overwhelm the capacity to read, challenge conventions of reading, and demand new possibilities of reading” (Butler, 1993, p.20). In addition, the subversive drive of such a practice, which is not simply a counter-reading, lies in its capacity to raise questions. According to the feminist scholar Susanne Luhmann (1988, p.149):

Such an approach, rather than assuming the student as ignorant or lacking knowledge, inquires into, for example, how textual positions are being taken up by the reading or learning subject. This inquiry is made more difficult in its refusal to assume that these positions are determined solely by the text, or by what is taught.

Accordingly, my feministqueer reading becomes an act of enquiry that considers how each textual position – those required of both the reader and the characters – is related ‘to existing social and psychic struggles’ (Walkerdine, 1990) and, for this reason, must be questioned and investigated rather than just accepted. Indeed, textual positions are:

Not just grafted on to a cognate and waiting subject, who can easily be changed. Rather, the positions and relations created in the text [...] relate to existing social and psychic struggles and provide a fantasy vehicle which inserts the reader into the text (Walkerdine, 1990, p.89).

Accordingly, a feministqueer reading addresses such questions: how do the readers insert themselves in the text? How are the text's characters posited? "What kind of identifications are at stake in this process? What structures these identifications? How do identifications become possible, what prevents them?" (Luhmann, 1988, p.149). Where is the resistance to knowledge located? Where does a text stop making sense to the reader? Where does the breakdown of meaning occur? (Luhmann, 1988). Through these questions, the feministqueer reading practice becomes an act of ignorance seen as a form of resistance, a desire not to accept already given meanings. I talk of ignorant reading in the wake of Shoshana Felman (1987, p.79): "ignorance [...] is not a passive state of absence, a simple lack of information: it is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information". In other words, I call for the kind of ignorance described by Felman (1987), which consists of a refusal to acknowledge only one implication in the examined text. Accordingly, my feministqueer reading implies a degree of ignorance of normative methods of learning, a process of inquiring and bringing one's own experiences into the text. What I am suggesting here, along with Felman and Britzman (1995), is a proliferation of possible identifications rather than a limited number of fixed and close identifications, positions and interpretations of myths.

In addition, in order to better explain the function of my feministqueer reading, I link it to the idea of 'loose readings' (Quinn, 2010). The attribution of looseness is not a stigmatization; rather, the term embraces both a sense of rejection and disconnection from institutionalized readings, serving to explore texts beyond gender stereotypes. Indeed, 'looseness' represents:

[...] A boast underlying one's rejection of 'good' reading habits and 'good' citizenship. Its implications of moral and physical laxity [...] prize the excessive and the unrestrained. As such, the usage is akin to the valorizations of parody and surplus found in current theorizations of mimicry and performativity (Quinn, 2010, p.18)⁵⁶.

I personally think that the technique of loose reading well represents the feministqueer practice of disruption of the universal truth of dominant readings. Furthermore, it adds to the practice of feministqueer reading the moral and ethical responsibility of forming critical citizens. At the origin of this link between feministqueer close reading and loose reading, there is the idea that the act of reading per se has socio-political consequences due to the thoughts that it provokes: on one hand, there are reading practices which initiate the reader to 'the canon' and educate them to be a good, intellectual citizen, placid and accepting. On the other hand, there are reading strategies that form a critical and conscious reader, engendering responsibilities that can be socially empowering. The feministqueer close reading that I propose belongs to the latter category: it is a practice against the educational strategy of surveillance and control, which produces empowered thinkers, while exhibiting identitarian differences and gender possibilities beyond the binary; it undoes the limits

⁵⁶From the dominant perspective, a good reader and thus good citizen is someone who supports the dominant politics and transmits normalized knowledge.

and the boundaries set up by normalizing interpretations. Indeed, “straight reading continues to produce binary distinctions of self-other and normal-deviate” (Pinar, 1998, p.62); rather, feministqueer reading aims at disrupting such normalizing discourses. In addition to this, the act of close reading from a feministqueer perspective can be defined as a ‘praxis’ inasmuch as it forms a bridge between theory and practice. According to *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Bottomore, 1983, p.386):

Praxis is the self-creative activity through which we make the world; it is my favorite part of exegesis, the central concept of a philosophy that did not want to remain a philosophy, philosophy becoming practical.

Thus, reading from a feministqueer gaze is a praxis – composed of reflection and action, both relevant in the construction of social relations –, inasmuch as it can contribute to shape minds of individual citizens and communities. In addition, it is a feminist praxis, as intended by Rosemarie Buikema, in “Dialogue on the Feminist Research Praxis” (2014, p.285):

A feminist praxis by implication has to be motivated by dedication and resilience and also by grounded knowledge of the past [...] Feminist praxis also means to highlight these genealogies of female, queer and feminist thought [...] It is indeed ethical because it fights hegemonic meanings and institutions and produces knowledge in the service of global justice. It produces the knowledge we need in order to reach our goals, that is to say in order to be able to recognize and change injustices.

Accordingly, my feministqueer close reading is a praxis because it engages with theory – mostly queer theory – and aims at an ethical action, namely the production of emancipatory knowledge to change the perspective on binary identifications. Following Surya Nayak (2015) – a scholar who reflects on the political activism implicit in close reading –, my feministqueer close reading can be defined as reactive praxis inasmuch as it serves to deconstruct social constructions such as, firstly, those relating to gender. Put differently, this practice is not limited to the text, rather it is instrumental to the act of deconstructing oppressive knowledge and undoing normative thoughts. In order to achieve this, it operates by asking the reader to occupy the text’s margin and by making use of this position, so that the marginal position⁵⁷ becomes the condition for moving beyond binary figurations.

Consequently, the reading method I suggest is a praxis because it harmonizes theory and practice, thus producing the virtuous circle of thought and aware action. In *Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom* (1994), hooks argues that:

Those critical thinkers working with issues of pedagogy who are committed to cultural studies, must combine theory and practice in order to affirm and demonstrate pedagogical practices engaged in creating a new language, rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentering authority and rewriting the institutional and discursive borderlands in which politics becomes a condition for reasserting the relationship between agency, power and struggle (hooks, 1994, p.129).

⁵⁷In the analysis that I will propose of *Antigonick*, the so-called ‘marginal position’ I will occupy is that pertaining to queer identity. In my reading, I take such a marginal condition as the position of the political signifier, which, as an outsider, prompts a social transformation (Butler, 1993).

Thereby, the feministqueer reading praxis, as an educational method, teaches how to turn critical thought into emancipatory action: the act of analyze literary structures, relations and identities can serve to raise awareness about the human multiplicity beyond (gender) dualisms. Moreover, it is a subjective praxis; as a consequence, it is a necessarily partial but socially-constructive practice. In this respect, it is essential to mention the role and the positionality of the feministqueer reader during the reading act. Indeed, the reader is an ignoring agent, a self-inquirer, who brings forth their personal and intellectual experiences. The reader approaches the text from their own critical standpoint; for this reason, the act of reading cannot abstract from the reader's context nor from a number of potential identitarian problems related to their position. In this respect, the feministqueer reader situates themselves in a certain space and time so as to put emphasis on the context and historicity of their socially-grounded reading practice. To make a bridge between this practice and its pedagogical function, I draw on the works of Freire, in *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987), as he reflects on the importance of contextualizing the practice of reading:

I say that reading is not just to walk on the words, and it is not flying over the words either. Reading is re-writing what we are reading. Reading is to discover the connections between the text and the context of the text, and also how to connect the text/context with my context, the context of the reader (Freire, 1987, p.10).

In other words, the reader – who is the knower in the process – must bring forth, during the reading praxis, their own being, anchored to a certain socio-historical context, which frames and influences their production of knowledge (Lykke, 2010). As a consequence of such a precise positionality, the feministqueer reader rejects the adherence to an authoritarian truth contained in the myth and disregards any monolithic value given by normative and institutional powers: their act of reading is guided by skepticism and scrutiny. Hence, the feministqueer reader investigates the text not as someone who already knows, but rather as by struggling against the universalizing authority of the text: the feministqueer reader is irreverent (Weiler, 2003); as a consequence, such a reader does not submit to the text, nor is submissive in front of the text.

In addition, I add to the method of feministqueer close reading a connotation of moral attentiveness to contemporary issues; this can be translated into bringing to the act of reading a critical awareness of one's own context and of one's duties in the socio-political interactions one is involved in. In particular – as I will point out clearly in reading *Antigonick* – I consider the feministqueer reader being attentive to the contemporary problematic notion of queer dissonances and thus capable of acknowledging several identitarian and relational possibilities. In sum, the feministqueer reader, through the act of knowledge production, problematizes and deconstructs

normative, stable and hegemonic interpretations of myths, by engaging with a set of multiple, possible signifiers. Then, applying these possibilities to their own context, the reader is able to attack the (hetero) norms and (gender) binary they find there; in so doing, the feministqueer knower takes on the responsibility of queering knowledge and making it a source of socio-political improvement.

To clarify how the close reading praxis I am explaining works, I must first introduce the importance of questioning: in other words, what I define the process of critical inquiry. Indeed, reading from a feministqueer perspective serves to develop queer action from queer theory, especially through the act of critical questioning. As Freire puts it (1987, p.11):

But for me, what is important, what is indispensable, is to be critical. Criticism creates the necessary intellectual discipline, asking questions to the reading, to the writing, to the book, to the text.

Thus, to inquire means to be critical; consequently to read means to inquire and to research in order to intervene in the production of critical knowledge.

I search, I question and I submit myself to questioning [...] and in so doing, I intervene. And intervening I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover (Freire, 1998, p.35).

According to Freire's view of research, by distancing oneself from normalized judgments, the feministqueer close reading practice operates through interrogatives, in order to prompt an intervention on the way of thinking. Hence, a feministqueer close reading, by questioning the text, serves to make space for new identifications beyond the accepted and unquestioned binary oppositions: the act of interrogating the words, patterns and 'prepackaged' interpretations of a text is a strategy to open its borders to alternative representations and analyses. In particular, in my feministqueer reading, interrogating the mythical text implies queering it, in order to open up spaces for identitarian inclusiveness. Queering the text means engaging with it as if it were an ever-changing phenomenon⁵⁸ that can give rise to any number of interpretations. To look at the text with a feministqueer gaze means to make the text become a source of possibilities that go beyond binary boundaries and, thus, to refuse to see it as a site of stable and fixed representations. In such a way, the literary text acquires a concrete structure, formed through its relation to the reader: the text belongs to the same context as the reader and they both take on an active role in consolidating a meaningful dialogue. In other words, a feministqueer critical reading unites the reader and the text

⁵⁸ I use the term 'phenomenon' as Barad's intends it in "Intra-action, an interview to Karen Barad" (2012). A phenomenon is an object of research, which is both the result of the process of siting and an active agent existing independently from its relation to the researcher. I intend this relation as the one existing between the reader and the text, which is the literary object of my research. In this relation, according to Barad, it is fundamental to consider the inter-intraconnectedness and relationality of reader and text. Indeed, a certain text provides a certain interpretation through its relation with a certain reader; and a different one, in relation to others. It can assume several shapes depending on its contextualization and the reader.

in a mutual creation and re-production of knowledge: the reading act is a dialogic and dialectically educational encounter of the reader with the text, which is responsible for the development of both the reader and the text's meaning. Following Freire in *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (1998, p.34):

Reading involves a kind of relationship with the text, which offers itself to me and to which I give myself and through the fundamental comprehension of which I undergo the process of becoming a subject. While reading I am not just a captive of the mind of the text as if it were simply a product of author [...] Therefore, it is as necessary to be immersed in existing knowledge as it is to be open and capable of producing something that does not exist yet.

According to Freire, the reading praxis is a self-reflexive act, which gives rise to self-knowledge and, thus, shapes critical thinkers. When applied to the act of close reading, I think that Sedgwick's (1991) analysis of writing as a 'mental masturbation', which evokes solitary pleasure, is very illuminating. To sum up her main idea in "Jane Austen and the Masturbating girl" (1991), Sedgwick draws a link between fantasy, literary pleasure, critical self-engagement, self-reflexivity and autoeroticism. She also considers the relational aspect of each literary process, which, while enhancing self-criticism, may also develop into a practice that produces communitarian knowledge. By connecting the acts of writing – as explored by Sedgwick – and reading as two manifestations of literary production, I consider close reading as an autoerotic encounter in which the self-enquiry is preceded and guided by acts of imagination. The fantasy produced by the act of close reading is analogous to the fantasy of masturbation: imagination is pushed forward and it generates self-engagement and self-reflexivity, which thus enhances self-criticism. Consequently, similarly to writing, reading can, by making the reader a knowing subject, become a praxis that encourages social transformation. To make this happen, it is necessary to be aware of the interdependency of the personal and the political: while posing questions, the reading praxis deconstructs the subject/object power scheme, so as to bring about social change in non-hierarchical directions.

After having emphasized the connection between the reader and the text and, furthermore, the importance of situating the subject in time and space and position, it is necessary to investigate what it means to read from a feministqueer perspective, focusing in particular on the steps one can follow to learn to produce transgressive forms of knowledge: "we need to read seriously, but above all we need to learn what it really means to read!" (Freire, 1987, p.10). In what follows, I expound on the feministqueer reading method, observing the passages it is composed of. In my opinion, close reading from a feministqueer perspective is a fight with the text – albeit love-driven. It involves engaging in a conflict with the text and this is a very demanding operation. Even though the reading praxis is situated and partial, in what follows I go through the reading steps that I have

identified and put together, as general guidelines for any feministqueer close reading⁵⁹. Thus, in my opinion, in order to engage in a feministqueer close reading the reader must, first of all, situate themselves; secondly, go through the text repeatedly in order to observe their resistances to patterns of normalization and to become aware of their feelings towards the text. Thirdly, the reader must deconstruct their resistances and the text's latent parts using both feministqueer theory and individual experiences. Finally, the reader must fill the gaps in order to undo the (gender) binaries and discover new feministqueer meanings. Elizabeth Grosz outlines some of these steps, in reference to the practice of close reading:

1) Identify the binaries, the oppositions that structure an argument; 2) reverse/displace the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it as the very condition of the positive term; and 3) create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms which transcends a binary logic by simultaneously being both a neither of the binary terms (Grosz, 1989, XV).

The above quote well describes the three main phases of the close reading process: identifying resistances to the text; analyzing these resistances and reconstructing alternative meanings. In the feministqueer reading technique I propose, 'situating' one's position as a reader in a spatio-temporal context precedes the reading itself and provides the necessary background to create an embodied and inclusive agenda that can be a useful means to analyze and to impact on the one's surroundings. As far as the first step of a feministqueer close reading is concerned, it is very important to enter into an intimate relationship with the text so as to shed any ready-made and institutional tools of analysis, and instead to identify one's own resistances. Such resistances lie in passages in which the fruition of the text becomes slow and complicated, and the reader finds it hard to follow:

The place where I get stuck, or where I suddenly reverse my stance, or where the narrative flow breaks down are often the mark of my resistance – where what really concerns me remains hidden, or begins to surface [...] I read and reread a particular text until something catches my attention. I look for the resistances, the gaps in a text – where is its smooth surface disrupted? [...] Repetitive reading or listening is necessary to get past the tendency to "understand" or gloss over these glitches, to fill in the gaps, to hear not the text or the other voice but our own [...] Returning to and marking these spots, I can start to reconstruct another reading that undergirds the first one the text offers (Wallace, 1999, p.194).

Resistance can thus be found in those passages where the reader interrupts their reading and gives space to questions, because they feel a tension. It is located in the flaws of the narration, which can open up new possibilities; it indicates the places where issues regarding opposition, separation and exclusion arise. In particular, it indicates the places where the reader recognizes the repetition of gender hierarchies as entrapped in a fixed binary; furthermore, it is the cracking point where heteronormative constrictions place opposite gender roles, compulsory desires and normative

⁵⁹I identified these steps empirically: firstly, I re-read, and analysed *Antigonick*, then I reconstructed the steps of the process I had put into practice. In other words, I spontaneously put into practice each step that I later singled out in describing the feministqueer reading method.

relationships between genders. On this subject, I quote Chandra Mohanty's essay "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberation Education in the 1990s" (1989-1990), in which the scholar gives a definition of political resistance that deeply inspired me:

Resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourse and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces. Resistance that is random and isolated is clearly not as effective as that which is mobilized through systemic politicized practices of teaching and learning (Mohanty, 198-1990, p.185).

Accordingly, where the feministqueer reader feels a resistance to the text is precisely where relations of power based on sex and gender are rooted, where the reader recognizes that a dominant, (hetero)normative and binary discourse dominates the narration. Consequently, the resistance represents a silent gap in the text, due to a lack of inclusive meanings, in favor of hierarchical and sexist ones. Discussing critical thinking, Adrienne Rich in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (1984) refers to silence and absence as encoded terms that symbolize the places of resistance to a normative knowledge production:

It means that most difficult thing of all: listening and watching in art and literature, in the social sciences, in all the descriptions we are given of the world, for the silences, the absences, the nameless, the unspoken, the encoded – for there we will find the true knowledge [...]
(Rich, 1984, p.28).

In addition, these absences that signal resistances can derive not only from the text itself but also from the interpretations people have made of the text. In this case, the resistance might represent a gap between what is in the text and what the normative and unquestioned analysis read in it. In both cases, the reader who approaches the text must become defenseless in order to rationally observe the gaps and to emotionally feel what changes when the linearity of reading is interrupted. Hence, a feministqueer reading method entails the recognition of these resistances, through an in-depth observation of the text and attention to one's feelings. In other words, it is very important to analyze resistances by considering the reader's body and feelings. As such, the identification of the places where the resistance dwells – which consists of a detailed close reading, focused on finding the encoded and unspoken meanings – is an embodied act. As I will show in the last chapter, during my feministqueer reading of *Antigonick*, I became stuck in some passages of the play, and felt bodily tension, rage and resistance while encountering some lines – which I will discuss below – that repeat normalizing and stereotypical patterns of identification, by repeating the (gender) binary.

It follows that, as an experience of human development, the identification of resistances represents a corporeal act involving both thought and feeling. Indeed, on one hand, such investigation is made possible by a critical inquiry of the text that produces meanings from the grass-roots, and thus it gives rise to a parallel form of knowledge, in contention with the official one: to individuate the resistances to normative patterns is a way to produce dissenting knowledge

and thus, to create the bases for alternative knowledge. On the other hand, the identification of resistances is influenced by one's intimate ability to listen to one's feelings. Such "kind of knowing through an exploration of feeling and emotion requires collective inquiry and constant re-evaluation. It is a contingent and positioned claim to truth" (Shor, 1995, p.37). Thus, for the purpose of the close reading, the knower must be attentive to their own feelings, since they are resistant sources of knowledge: feelings can be a powerful means of resisting to dominant interpretations and can provide an acute and new means of understanding.

In other words, certain feelings – such as, for example, nervousness, anxiety, rage and frustration –, can impose a personal and violent resistance to the text so as to push the reader towards a re-formulation of the resistance itself. Consequently, feelings ground a locus of knowing as a guide to theoretical understanding; in such a way, feelings represent a cognition-power source that trigger a knowing awareness (Fisher, 1987). To sum up, the identification of the resistances to the text is a partial and personal reading reaction, which entails a critical observation of the text and an unconditioned attention to one's feelings. Furthermore, such recognition must be contextualized within the reader's inclination towards positive ignorance: approaching the text unarmed, the reader consciously ignores the ready-made analysis of it, and engages with the gaps and with the silences, by constructing and developing other readings. When the reader recognizes these resistances to the text, something new speaks to them and requires to be heard by new ears. In a feministqueer reading, the resistances – namely, the spaces lacking inclusive meanings - or better, the space of repetition of normative and binary patterns of identification – open up gaps for another voice to enter: an inclusive, non-binary, non-heteronormative and intersectional voice fills the silences.

Consequently, the successive step consists of undoing the resistances and reconstructing alternative meanings. In other word, this is the moment of "uncovering and reclaiming subjugated knowledge to suggest alternative readings" (Mohanty, qtd. in hooks, 1994). In particular, it consists of reversing the binary towards open and non-binary frames, by creating new links that transcend the binary and the notion of (hetero) normality. This step implies the interpretation of the resistances through feministqueer critical thinking and personal experience, in order to overcome the normalized and binary logic attributed to the text by hegemonic and patriarchal interpretations. Indeed, feminist theory validates differences, challenges universal and dominant thoughts whilst seeking to bring about changes in the world of multiple meanings; experience, on the other hand, gives the knower a personal standing point from where to build their analysis. A feministqueer analysis grounded in self-experience allows the reader to bridge the gap between the words and the world. Indeed, the words the subject reads are analyzed through individual or collective experiences, thus they must be related to the world of facts – to life. My feministqueer reading of

Antigonick comes from my experience of reading myths normatively and it distances itself from this practice. Thus, moving from my personal experience, I will engage with Butler's theories in order to undo and to reconstruct my resistances and, furthermore, to connect the identity of the mythical Antigone with actual identities that are uncomfortable within binary boundaries. Thus, by merging theory and practice, the third reading phase renders the feministqueer knowledge a potential, practical and empowering action. In short, listening to the personal resistances in the text is a way to occupy a transformative feministqueer position and to resist normative, binary and patriarchal interpretations. In addition, it enables to challenge the indeterminacy of normalizing relations and identities and to reflect on the multiple identifications that are significant for feminism.

In conclusion, I agree with Alexander Doty, a Gender Studies professor (1993, XV), who claims that "a [feminist]queer reading practice is a reading beyond the assumed in the hope that something more of all our identities might be unleashed". Indeed, reading from a feministqueer gaze "points to the performative aspects of texts and bodies and it also reveals the act of identification" (Walcott, 1998, p.159), which is always in process and never unique. Feministqueer close reading allows to create a fluid organization of concepts, values and knowledge that transcends the binary logic and enables the reader to reconstruct the interpretative gaps. To advocate a transformative feministqueer reading that transgresses the normative boundaries of a text requires a full self-engagement through the text's contradictions, followed by a feministqueer analysis. Investigating the resistances to normative, binary, sexist and patriarchal discourses, either in the text or in its interpretations, is an embodied act that provides new multiple standpoints and possibilities of identifications, by breaking down the fixed borders of the (gender) binary. Thus, developing 'other' possibilities within the text pushes the reader to think beyond normalcy and to analyze their personal engagement with the text as a means for change, encouraging non-hierarchical, transgressive and emancipatory modes of thinking and behaving.

Ι Στάσιμον⁶⁰

Chorus: Human beings are skilful creatures. They invented words, languages, then writing. Literary education has become the highest form of cultural and social knowledge; able either to influence minds constructively or to destroy entire societies. From school to academia, education tends always to have consequences in practical and everyday life. The way human beings think, behave and act in community is largely influenced by their education. By forming minds and thoughts, education has always had an influence on political and relational life. It makes human beings into critical citizens and for this reason, only the capacity for openness, inclusiveness and embracing difference can enhance emancipation. Only an education which does not ignore the multiplicity of life can be empowering for the 'Others' in the society.

Human beings learn in order to live; learning and living are a mutual influence; hence, to deconstruct a normative and biased order is necessary primarily for the sake of unlearning hegemonic, binary and exclusionary thoughts. Education can liberate from the yoke of oppression. I do not speak exclusively of educating the oppressed; rather, I mean educating each human being to think inclusively and to act critically; to abolish closed categories and divisive logic. I invoke an education that helps to transgress the boundaries of acceptability, and which creates interconnections among human beings, while disrupting hierarchical classes. It's time to cross the imposed borders and to encourage human beings to think differently and to freely queer their identities.

⁶⁰ According to Halliwell's translation of *The Poetics of Aristotle*, the *stasimon* is a choral element; "it is a choral song in a metre other than anapaestic or trochaic" (1987, p.44). The *stasimon*, in both *Antigone* and *Antigonick*, is a 'song' regarding the relationship between human beings and nature; the link between human beings and the surrounding world, and the relationship with one's own Self. In the *stasimon* that I provide above for the 'play' that I am writing, I attempt to follow the footsteps of the original *stasimon*, by moving from a reflection on the skilfulness of human beings to the potential of education as an instrument to develop empowered minds.

3. *Third Episode*

Feministqueer politics of reading myths: a pedagogical practice beyond the (gender) binary

In the previous chapter, I stated my commitment to queer reading methods – from schools to academia – in order to produce knowledge that goes beyond the (gender) binary and that acknowledges the multiple possibilities of self-identification. Moreover, I outlined my methodological framework and I described my feministqueer reading method as a practice for engaging with texts with a feministqueer gaze. In particular, I offered methodological tools to engage with myths in an alternative, inclusive and beyond the binary method. Broadly speaking, I suggested the possibility of a social transformation through a diffractive and situated educational practice: feministqueer reading is a pedagogical method I have created in order to move reflections beyond the (gender) binary. In what follows, I inscribe my project in a pedagogical frame, by clarifying what a feministqueer pedagogy⁶¹ is: a pedagogy to question the normative and dominant knowledge. Firstly, I will introduce feminist pedagogy, then queer pedagogy and finally I will justify my focus on classical myth as a feministqueer pedagogical medium. The chapter's structure does not aim to either categorize or establish a hierarchy between feminist pedagogy and queer pedagogy; rather, it intends to mirror and clarify my feministqueer perspective and its interactions within a pedagogical frame. Indeed, this division into sections allows me to move from broader concepts related to non-formal education towards the precise focus of my analysis: I propose a postmodernist theory of multiplicity and pedagogy⁶², which rethinks normative contents and formal and binary learning methodologies, in order to move towards a radical change of selves and communities.

⁶¹ It is interesting to note that I will use the word 'pedagogy' in my analysis but I will deconstruct its original meaning. Indeed 'pedagogy' evokes the male teacher-student relationship at the heart of the knowledge transmission. As Jane Gallop argues, pedagogy recalls pederasty, where "[a] greater man penetrates a lesser man with his knowledge" (1982, p.63). In my use of the word pedagogy, I deconstruct both the idea that pedagogy is a transmission of knowledge from a teacher to a student and the fact that it is a merely male practice.

⁶² I have already discussed my position as a feministqueer researcher and my commitment to reflecting on identity in its postmodernist meaning in the first chapter. Here, I link the relevance of this position to pedagogy itself.

3.1 Feminist pedagogy: an overview

Following the feminist scholar Patti Lather⁶³ in her book *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern* (1991), I define non-formal pedagogy as a practice for learning about strategies and methodologies of a postmodern practice. As I will clarify later on in this section, the non-formal pedagogy I focus on aims at a transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interrelation between the learner and the knowledge produced. In the following section, I will expound on feminist pedagogy and what it represents for me, having been mainly inspired and guided by bell hooks' text, *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994). Alongside this, I will provide a general time-line to contextualize feminist pedagogy and then, in defining it, I will make a comparison between hooks' non-formal feminist education and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, from which feminist pedagogy evolved. Even though both hooks and Freire's pedagogical works are mostly concerned with classroom methodologies and teaching practices aimed at including 'the oppressed' (Freire, 1971), their theories have informed my pedagogical project, which is, instead, mostly related to curricula and critical reading methods. In particular, even though Freire's works are more concerned with developing strategies of critical pedagogy within the classroom and hooks' works offer insights into liberating classrooms from race, sex, gender and class biases, both their arguments have been influential for my analysis.

Feminist pedagogy is a non-formal pedagogy⁶⁴ grounded in political activity, particularly in the consciousness-raising groups of women's liberation movements of the late 1960-1970s in the United States. This feminist approach to pedagogy looked for ways to challenge the traditional and patriarchal educational strategies and it sought to replace them with practices promoting equity and justice inside and outside the classroom:

This emphasis on social change recognises feminist pedagogy as a form of feminist practice having its roots in the women's movement [...] The intrinsic link between feminist pedagogy and organizing for social change reflects the connection between the classroom and the world outside (Briskin, 1990, p.29).

Thus, emerging from the application of feminist theory to educational practices, feminist pedagogy recognized education both as a site for struggle and as a tool for stimulating social

⁶³Patti Lather has taught qualitative research, feminist methodology and gender and education at Ohio State University since 1988.

⁶⁴According to Tight (1996, p.68), non-formal education is about "acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognized educational institutions". The idea of non-formal education developed in the 1970s, when Fordham (1993) suggested four characteristics that constitute a non-formal education: relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups; concern with specific categories of persons; a focus on clearly defined purposes and flexibility in organizations and methods. Following such a scheme, the non-formal education I focus on is concerned with queer possibilities and thus, broadly speaking, with inclusiveness towards gender non-conform people. Taking this term from bell hooks in *Teaching to transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), the non-institutional and/or non-formal pedagogy I imagine is an alternative to the one institutionalized in Italian schools – in its practices, methodologies and contents; it is an education which incorporates in its curricula issues of personal experiences, intersectionality, inclusivity of marginalized group, identity, gender, sex, race, class, and so forth.

transformations. Its main concern was to activate a type of knowledge that could change the *status quo*, with a special attention to addressing the main normative questions – first of all, the female/male binary, but also “diversity, agency, resistance, multiple voices, centre and margin, power and authority” (Briskin, 1992, p.252). Furthermore, hoping both to change education and to change society through education, feminist pedagogy aimed at intervening directly in educational practices in order to simultaneously operate in the political sphere. In this respect, feminists have been, since the 1980s, in US and Europe, developing a detailed critique of the curricula and related educational methodologies. In those years, feminists unmasked the contents of curricula to reveal their mono-perspective: they were androcentric and supported only the interests of white, heterosexual, privileged males. Accordingly, feminist pedagogy – especially in Europe – arose as a ‘pedagogy of differences’; indeed, it developed in the 1980s from the work of French philosophers – Luce Irigaray amongst them –, working on the philosophy of sexual difference. According to Gamberi, Maio and Selmi (2010, p.10):

É da queste premesse epistemologiche e politiche, infatti, che nasce “la pedagogia della differenza” un progetto educativo volto a dar voce all’esperienza della femminilità. Questo approccio ha valorizzato la pluralità delle esistenze in aperta sfida con modelli educativi e modalità di creazione e trasmissione dei saperi travestiti da neutralità universale, ma in verità costruiti a immagine e somiglianza della maschilità⁶⁵.

Hence, feminist pedagogy developed firstly for the sake of transforming curricula so they would include differences: “a transformed curriculum would take account of the diversity of experience based on gender, race, class and sexual orientation, and promote an inclusivity of voices and participation” (Briskin, 1992, p.249). Current feminist pedagogy is based on re-configurations of knowledge, education, power and political action that move beyond school and academia towards the political dimension. In other words, feminist pedagogy foregrounds education not only as a struggle for meaning, but rather as a struggle over power relations. Accordingly, when it comes to feminist educational approaches, feminist pedagogy opens the borders of normativity in order to embrace differences and to break normative stereotypes. First of all, it is engaged in undoing the gender binary that prescribes a marginal role for women and a central role for men: in other words, those stereotypes that reflect normative notions of femininity and masculinity. But, broadly speaking, feminist pedagogy has the potential to question and to destabilize the whole set of stereotypes built upon binary hierarchies regarding race, class, language, age and so forth: it attempts to deconstruct essentialist and simplifying beliefs that reproduce inequalities, in order to promote a transformation of education. Indeed, it pursues a transformation of society – achievable

⁶⁵“‘The pedagogy of difference’, as a project aiming to give voice to female experiences, arose from these epistemological and political premises. This approach has acknowledged the value of the plurality of experience by challenging normal patterns and by neutralizing educational practices – which are indeed constructed as mirroring masculinist practices” (My translation).

through changes in schools and academia – encouraging practices that foster empowerment, community and inclusiveness: changing the curricula implies a transformation of the institutional and normative ways of learning and being. By keeping this aim in view, feminist pedagogy brings to the fore people’s concrete experiences of gender, sex, class, race, in schools, in learning practices and contents and, finally, in society.

Feminist pedagogy is the first that has attempted to unmask the dynamics of power/powerlessness through intellectual practices of education, and also to call for a “reformulation of the knowledge-as-accumulated-capital model of education” (Mohanty, 1989-1990, p.185). Aiming at the emancipation of communities through education, feminist pedagogy sees education as a means to develop critical consciousness, in order to make the student open to world’s differences. As Marzano puts it (2015, p.127):

Per affrontare correttamente [certe] tematiche, superando posizioni preconette e barricate ideologiche, è indispensabile anzitutto un’educazione delle coscienze e un’apertura dell’intelligenza alla comprensione della realtà⁶⁶. [...] E la chiave è e sarà sempre l’educazione. Per fare capire a tutti e tutte, fin da piccolo, che il proprio valore è intrinseco e non strumentale; che ogni persona, a differenza delle cose che hanno un prezzo, non ha mai un prezzo ma una dignità; e che la dignità non dipende da quello che gli altri pensano di noi, da quello che gli altri ci dicono o meno, da quello che gli altri ci fanno. Non si può combattere la violenza se non [ci si educa] alla consapevolezza del proprio valore e della propria libertà.

As far as the necessity of raising self-consciousness in order to educate to freedom is concerned, I draw on the works of the pedagogue and leading advocate of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire. Indeed, in his researches on education – I focus mainly on *Coscientization* (1975), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) and *Education, the practice of Freedom* (1976) – he reflects on the notion of conscientization⁶⁷: i.e., education that gives rise to critical consciousness. Importantly, ‘coscientization’ links the private and public spheres inasmuch as it is an individual practice that has public effects: a conscious subject is a critical citizen. Furthermore, it focuses on perceiving and exposing social and political contradictions while taking action against oppression. Thus, conscientization refers to the subject’s internalization of knowledge rather than a superficial appropriation that does not push towards any social change.

Thus, it is important to stress that following the heritage of Freire’s conscientization, feminist pedagogy educates to raise critical (self)consciousness – about sex, gender, race, class and, generally speaking, differences – whilst developing social evolution through intersectionality. As Kathleene Weiler (2001, p.68) clearly states, feminist pedagogy “emphasizes the importance of

⁶⁶“In order to engage with such topics, in order to overcome prejudicial positions and to break ideological barriers, it is necessary to teach openness towards and comprehension of one’s surroundings. To this aim, education will always be the key. In order to let every human being know that their value lies within themselves; in order to understand that every human being has a dignity which does not depend on what other people say, think or even do to us. It is not easy to fight violence if we do not teach people to be aware of their own value and freedom.” (My translation)

⁶⁷hooks too discusses this term (1994), and translates it into self-awareness and self-engagement.

consciousness raising, the existence of an oppressive social structure, and the need to change it, and the possibility of social transformation". Hence, feminist pedagogy employs education as an instrument to raise self-consciousness in order to shape students as both resistant and free subjects. In other words, feminist education becomes both a form of resistance to normalizing patterns and a means for liberation deriving from self-conscientization. As such, it is clear that feminist pedagogy has inherited several principles from Freire's critical pedagogy. Indeed, besides actualizing practices of self-conscientization, feminist pedagogy is strongly committed to rethinking education as the practice of freedom, which is the main goal of Freire's liberatory pedagogy (1994)⁶⁸. However, feminist pedagogy as it has been developing in the United States – where the term refers in fact to critical pedagogy – provides a situated example of critical pedagogy, which is at once close to Freire's pedagogy and simultaneously very different from it, for many reasons. Indeed, both feminist pedagogy and Freire's critical pedagogy envisage social transformation, underlining issues concerning oppression, consciousness and social change. In addition, both argue for a subject acting in history with critical awareness and with a commitment to social justice; and for the liberation from oppression and marginalization.

Nevertheless, the great difference is that feminist pedagogy alone grants primary attention to women and especially to the intersection between gender, sex, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity in educational practices; rather, Freire's pedagogy rests on a mainly masculine vision of education. In the essay "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy", the feminist scholar Elisabeth Ellsworth (1989, p.311) declares:

The lessons learned from feminist struggles to make a difference through defiant speech offer both useful critiques of the assumptions of critical pedagogy and starting points for moving beyond its repressive myths.

Following Ellsworth's statement⁶⁹, feminist pedagogy has often accused Freire's critical pedagogy of remaining exclusive, patriarchal and privileged inasmuch as firstly, it refers to a male education system and secondly, it does not take into account differences regarding gender/sex or race and class. Consequently, practical feminist struggles for equality since the 1980s have been connected to the purpose of transforming education in this sense; and, conversely, transformed curricula have become weapons for feminist struggles. In so doing, feminist pedagogy does not presuppose a universal truth – as critical pedagogy does – rather, it keeps a focus on the positions, experiences and differences of single subjects. Indeed, feminist pedagogy questions the epistemological value of truth and knowledge in personal experience and, thus, it raises the question

⁶⁸Freire's theoretical works (1971) contain foundational statements of critical pedagogy, which teaches freedom basing it on claims of universal truth.

⁶⁹See Elisabeth Ellsworth's essay "Why Doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy"(1982).

of difference. In “What is Feminist Pedagogy?” Carolyn Shrewsbury underscores the commitment of feminist pedagogy to understanding the complexity of experiences, in order to celebrate difference:

[Feminist pedagogy includes] difference used in a creative way, to spark increased understanding of the many dimensions of life, of incongruities or paradoxes, the complexities inherent in seemingly simple things [...] It provides a mode of interrelationship that can be incorporated into a developing vision of a world in which hierarchical oppressive relationships are exchanged for autonomy within a community that celebrates differences (Shrewsbury, 1993, p.9).

Accordingly, feminist pedagogy questions the validity of fixed concepts and coherent subjects which move in history with only one stable identity; furthermore, it posits liberation and education in specific contexts and conditions. In other words, feminist pedagogy is built on the partial knowledge of one’s own changeable identity, which recognizes the contingent and situated claims of the self in process: in my opinion, it has the potential to liberate fixed subject positions. In sum, although feminist pedagogy could be considered a branch of critical pedagogies, it also challenges and overcomes their universal truths.

In concrete terms, feminist pedagogy refers to a set of practices – learning-teaching strategies and various approaches to content – grounded partly in critical pedagogy⁷⁰ and partly in feminist theory.

Emerging from the application of feminist theory to education, feminist pedagogy is based on an alternative instructional model. [...] Not only concerned with gender justice, feminist pedagogy seeks to remove oppressions inherent in the genderedness of all social relations and consequently of all societal institutions and structure (Sandell, 1991, pp. 180 -1).

Even though it is common to refer to feminist pedagogy as a single discourse, I want to clarify that feminist pedagogies are multiple inasmuch as they use different approaches and methodologies, mirroring the multi-layered streams of feminism itself. In addition, since it is a pedagogy situated in time, space and the learner’s experience, feminist pedagogy is an ongoing practice that redefines itself constantly in terms of its individual and social effects. Accordingly, experience gains an important role in feminist pedagogy: personal experience triggers a struggle for new knowledge. In this respect, Magda Lewis and Roger Simon (1986), a student and her teacher, consider experience as linked to the notion of struggle.

In practice this always implies a struggle – a struggle over discourses as the expression of both form and content, a struggle over interpretation of experience, and a struggle over “self”... it is a struggle that makes possible new knowledge that expands beyond individual experience and hence redefines our identities and the real possibilities we see in the daily condition of our lives (Lewis and Simon, 1986, p.469).

Thus, by assuming that non-formal education is a struggle for producing alternative knowledge through individual and collective experiences, it follows that education is not only a strategy used by political institutions to consolidate normative rules, but it might also be a means to challenge and to subvert the political order. Indeed, by questioning personal experience, feminist pedagogy forms a bridge between the personal and the public by enabling students/thinkers to question and thus to change the *status quo*.

One way, suggested above, is to say that education is a contested terrain where people are socialized and the future of society is at stake. On the one hand, education is a socializing activity organized, funded, and regulated by authorities who set a curriculum [...] on the other hand education is a social experience (Shor, 1995, p.13).

In line with this notion of education as a socializing activity, one of the primary purposes of feminist pedagogy is to prompt social participation while engaging with transformative possibilities. Put simply, feminist pedagogy aims at social transformations through education. This pedagogical approach attempts to create new forms of knowledge rooted in principles of personal and political liberation, critical democracy and social equality; further, it aims at breaking down hierarchies and creating new unbounded relations. Therefore, in order to give an in-depth explanation of what feminist pedagogy is and what it represents for me, I will now address hooks'⁷¹ articulation of it: indeed, for me hooks has been a challenging teacher, whose engagement has motivated me in my project of decolonizing given and normative mind-sets by engaging with classical myths. In *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) bell hooks – a writer, teacher, feminist and insurgent black intellectual – writes about a progressive, holistic education: an “engaged pedagogy [which] is more demanding than the conventional critical or feminist pedagogy” (hooks, 1994, p.15). Contrarily, it is my belief that feminist pedagogy involves rather engaging methodologies, since it requires using personal experience to illuminate and enhance the understanding of scholastic material. Moreover, such personal engagement in the process of knowledge production is necessary for self-actualization, which, consequently, might push the student to look for freedom: this is a requirement and also a necessary risk in order to make the learning practice an act of resistance (hooks, 1994). As hooks (1994) argues, by enhancing active participation – i.e., refusing to support pre-given and normalizing patterns – as opposed to a passive consumption of knowledge, such an engaged process brings about self-actualization via critical thinking. I also think that being engaged entails being vulnerable – not in the sense of being defenceless, but in the sense of exposing one’s mind, body, and spirit in the

⁷¹Gloria Jean Watkins (1952), better known by her pen name bell hooks, is an American author, feminist, and social activist. hooks' writing focuses on the intersectionality of race, gender, sex, sexuality within a capitalist, patriarchal and white-centred society. She reflects at length on power relations as responsible for producing and perpetuating systems of oppression and class domination. Here, I particularly refer to the texts *Teaching to transgress. Education at the Practice of Freedom* (1994); *Feminism is for Everybody. Passionate Politics* (2000) and *Teaching Community. A pedagogy of hope* (2003).

learning process – in order to give rise to self-actualizing knowledge. In defining the engaged educative process as a holistic practice promoting well-being, hooks quotes Thich Nhat Hanh⁷²:

Like Freire, his approach to knowledge called on students to be active participants, to link awareness with practice. Whereas Freire was primarily concerned with the mind, Thich Nhat Hanh offered a way of thinking about pedagogy which emphasized wholeness, a union of mind, body and spirit (hooks, 1994, p.14).

Alongside this, another important point of hooks' argument regards the possibility, central in engaged education, to make connections between life, ways of being and experience on one hand, and the knowledge produced on the other: we are, "as 'whole' human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (hooks, 1994, p.15). Indeed, following Freire's steps, in *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (2005), hooks points out the necessary link between theory and practice in producing knowledge able to empower the knower: theory or introspection in the absence of collective actions is just idealism or wishful thought (hooks, 1994). Thus, hook's engaged pedagogy consists of an educational path that calls for an interlacement between what one learns and what one lives. In this pedagogy, theory and, in general, the knowledge produced do not remain separate from the socio-political context; rather, they both actively influence it. Thus, it is clear that engaged education promotes a link between experience and knowledge:

Knowledge is derived from action [...] To know an object is to act upon it and to transform it [...] To know is therefore to assimilate reality into structures of transformation and these are the structures that intelligence constructs as a direct extension of our actions (hooks, 1994, p.22).

Engaged education is thus based on the overlap of theory and practice: experience shapes the production of knowledge and, conversely, the produced knowledge influences actions. In other words, a similar education produces progressive⁷³ knowledge, in terms of establishing a mutual influencing relation between the Self and the community that enacts the consequent freedom: "progressive education, education as the practice of freedom [which] enables us to confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection... to create community" (hooks, 2003, XV). In other words, this process is achieved by becoming aware of how the hegemonic system has shaped what has to be known and, consequently, by re-shaping it. Furthermore, progressive education coincides with personal growth as an active citizen, because it represents critical-democratic knowledge towards personal and social change. In this respect, another important element, which I deduce from hooks' analysis, is that a feminist, engaged and progressive pedagogy is a call for responsibility. By producing critical knowledge, the thinker becomes an instigator of social progression. Indeed, to

⁷²Thich Nhat Hanh (1926) is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, writer, teacher, and peace activist.

⁷³Freire uses the term 'empowering knowledge' to refer to a type of knowledge that can empower the community. Instead, hooks does not use the word 'empowering'; rather, she opts for the term 'progressive education' to emphasize a kind of knowledge that leads to personal and communitarian progress, and thus freedom.

choose not to take part in the politics of domination, neither as victim nor as perpetrator, requires an acknowledgement of one's own responsibility. Therefore, a critical and embodied practice of learning moves the subject from the private to the public, by providing the grounds from which to build a solid awareness that is necessary for social transformations. In particular, the "progressive, holistic education, 'engaged pedagogy'" (hooks, 1994, p.15) I call for aims to change society through the transformation of curricula, so that they do not reflect normative biases nor reinforce the dominant and patriarchal systems: in such a way, education becomes a site of feminist resistance and progression. Thus, following hooks, by challenging the borders of normative curricula, feminist pedagogy is an engaged form of education, which calls for an openness of thought towards inclusive and transgressive methods. In this process, transgression becomes an act of resistance to overcome hegemonic norms:

Transgression becomes a kind of reverse or counter-sublimation, undoing the discursive hierarchies and stratifications of bodies and cultures which bourgeois society has produced as the mechanism of its symbolic dominance (Stallybrass and White 1986, pp.200-1).

In this respect, hooks' political claim is a celebration of an education against and beyond boundaries; an education focussed on teaching openness through transgression: "urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink" (hooks, 1994, p.12) and make society progress. In particular, when I speak of the exigency of rethinking education through a feministqueer gaze, I refer to a set of alternative methodologies that foreground the multiplicity that constructs identities. This kind of feminist pedagogy can help develop critical awareness and thus encourage students to become critical thinkers and active citizens by empowering and emancipating them. Therefore, inspired by hooks, I think that engaged pedagogy is also a progressive pedagogy, in the sense that it is a form of critical-democratic education that serves to develop inquisitive citizens able to bring about social change.

In sum, feminist pedagogy, deriving from Freire's critical pedagogy, suggests a more complex realization of the Freirean idea of collective conscientization and struggle against oppression, since it acknowledges difference, multiplicity and experience, rooted as it is in the belief in the human capacity to feel, know and transform. In such a way, the public and inclusive education advocated by feminist pedagogy intends to foster methodologies that create unbiased knowledge, in which beliefs and identities are seen as evolving in the making. Furthermore, feminist pedagogy theorizes critical educational methods which aim to raise self-social consciousness; on top of this and differently from Freire's pedagogy, it underlines the importance for engaged education of the personal and situated position of the learner. In addition, as hooks clarifies (1994), feminist pedagogy is a self-engaged, empowering and emancipatory form of education, since its purpose lies

in de-hierarchizing power relations and in empowering ‘marginalized’ knowers, by using alternative methodologies. Finally, in my opinion, feminist pedagogy represents a transgressing and thus progressive form of education inasmuch as it can prompt social change through its use of methodologies that raise issues about the multiplicity of possible identifications.

3.2 Queering education: an intervention in normalcy

After having outlined what feminist pedagogy is to me, along with its main goals, I will now focus on queer pedagogy, by looking at what happens when queer theory is brought into education. My actual purpose is to combine queer pedagogy with feminist pedagogy – in line with my commitment as a feministqueer researcher and the feministqueer method of reading myths that I have created. Thus, I will ask myself how one can imagine a queer education. Is it a question of queering the curriculum? What does it mean to queer methods? What does it bring to a feminist approach to education? In other words, in this section, I approach these questions by examining what queer theory contributes to feminist educational purposes that wish to transgress learning practices. I zoom in on queer education as a radical praxis, implemented to interfere with the production of ‘normal knowledge’ and, thus, committed to disrupt the complicity shown by literature to Western society’s institutionalized normalcy. I focus mainly on queer theory’s denaturalization of gender identity categories, which provides fundamental challenges to and potentially liberating insights for, issues of epistemology and education. In so doing, I show how queer theory engages with an anti-normalizing and anti-normative knowledge creation project. In other words, it attempts to challenge the normative systems – especially the patriarchal and the heteronormative one – by showing that these are not natural, but rather socially constructed to secure the hierarchy of male/female categorizations:

Queer aims to spoil and transgress coherent (and essential) gender configurations and the desire for a neat arrangement of dichotomous sexual and gendered difference, central to both heterosexual and homosexual identities [...Moreover] if queer pedagogy is foremost concerned with a radical practice of deconstructing normalcy [...then,] the refusal of any normalization [...] necessarily has to be part of the queer agenda (Luhmann, 1988, p.151).

My focus is particularly on how queer theory offers a deconstructive critique of heterosexism, compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1978), the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), and the gender polarization (Bem, 1993). Thus, in bringing queer theory into pedagogical practices, my intent is to articulate a reflection on how to subvert the central strategies of normalization, especially concerning gender identifications and, consequently how to bring such unstable, differential identities and relations into a method of reading myths. Finally, I attempt to analyze the importance of approaching education from a queer perspective, especially when dealing with

classical myths. In so doing, I refer to this new educational approach's multiple spheres of influence: firstly, the classical curriculum, secondly, learning methodologies and, finally, the reader's awareness.

Thus, in this section, I connect queer theory to feminist pedagogy since they share the same aim of including marginal groups, a special commitment for the deconstruction of normalcy⁷⁴ and the same difficulties to be embraced:

[Feminist pedagogy] is critical of mainstream education as a site for the reproduction of unequal power relations. Similarly, queer turns critically against the practices of normalization at stake in the study of sexuality. At the same time both terms are under threat from their earlier reputations, and they share the common fate of reduction – of being rendered superfluous, and they not taken seriously (Luhmann, 1988, p.143).

Accordingly, some scholars argue that “queer theory is just another step further down the road initially paved by critical pedagogy, poststructural feminism, and theories of emancipatory education” (Meyer, 2007, p.29). It is my belief that this is too simplistic, since feminist pedagogy arose to give voice to different types of female experience, queer pedagogy arose to give voice to sex/gender differences. Moreover, in line with my commitment to break the either/or rhetoric, I intend to consider the combination of feminist and queer pedagogy as “radical pedagogies” (Luhmann, 1988, p.142) that interact one with the other. In such a way, my commitment to a feministqueer education lies in observing and acknowledging the complexity of experience, while questioning assumed identifications:

Non è più e non solamente, dunque, dare cittadinanza educativa all'esperienza della femminilità, ma assumere la valorizzazione della complessità e della molteplicità delle esperienze dei soggetti come obiettivo principale del fare educazione, e in ultima analisi del fare cittadinanza e democrazia (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi 2010, p.11).

Accordingly, regarding feminist and queer pedagogies, I especially stress the fact that both are ‘pedagogies of difference’, which ask themselves: “What if difference is a necessary condition of identity?” (Pinar, 1988, p.20). Indeed, they give value to the multiplicity of identities that challenge educational models of universal and undifferentiated patterns. Accordingly, feminist and queer pedagogies are “post-identity pedagogies” (Luhmann, 1998, p.141), which reflect on the infinite possibilities of self-identification, beyond the normalization implied by the specific study of gender/sex. For this reason, I dedicate this section to clarifying the continuity and the intersections between queer pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, throwing light especially on the influence of queer on pedagogy. Indeed, queer pedagogy has been developing with a special attention to the concept of ‘queer identity’: what does it mean? How can we imagine a queer pedagogy?

In “Queering/ Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing”, Susanne Luhmann points out that a queer pedagogy is more than the incorporation of queer contents in

⁷⁴Although the intervention in normalcy is a potential of feminist pedagogy, it becomes more explicit in queer pedagogy.

extant curricula, more than devising teaching strategies meant to make queer issues more palatable to students. Indeed, a queer pedagogy must address:

Both pedagogy's curiosity in the social relations at stake in the process of learning, and on queer critiques of identity-based knowledges. Thus, I will suggest that a queer pedagogy traverses identity demands central to other critical pedagogies and instead poses the question of how "a post-identity" pedagogy becomes thinkable (Luhmann, 1998, p.149).

Accordingly, by questioning the strategies of acceptance or refusal of certain identities, queer pedagogy attempts to blur the borders of fixed identitarian categories. In other words, it fosters the infinite proliferation of self-identifications, and, furthermore, it is based on the idea that, rather than finding the self in pre-given knowledge and representations, learning is about the process of risking the self's supposed unity (Luhmann, 1988). Queering pedagogy can be translated into breaking down the normalizing boxes and, thus, it refers to a process of de-normalizing learning methods. In particular, de-normalization aims to collapse the oppositional relations that are considered 'normal' by institutional education: such as the homo/hetero opposition and the female/male binary that are "central to Western societies and constitutive of Western culture, modes of thinking, and concepts of the modern self" (Luhmann, 1988, p.144). Moving from the gender dimension, queer pedagogy embraces identitarian differences in order to give voice and recognition to the plurality of identity's forms:

La dimensione del genere – e la riflessione sulle relazioni di genere che essa implica – offre l'accesso a una costellazione complessa di significati ed esperienze: è guardando attraverso di essa che è possibile articolare la molteplicità di differenze che stratificano i posizionamenti individuali e sociali della contemporaneità. Nella pratica pedagogica deve infatti trovare posto un tipo di educazione che sia in grado di decostruire i modelli dominanti, e che sappia ripensare i generi quali costruzioni sociali per farli diventare processi consapevoli [Dunque passando attraverso il genere, una educazione queer] è una educazione alla complessità, nel tentativo di dare conto di quella ricchezza culturale e interculturale, di quella diversità di corpi e orientamenti sessuali, che non sono altro che le differenze (al plurale), intese come risorsa e non come difetto o segno di inferiorità (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi, 2010, p.27)⁷⁵.

Thus, queer pedagogy simultaneously educates to the complexity of possible identification, and intervenes on normalcy. According to Deborah Britzman, a leading figure in this field:

Queer Theory offers methods of critiques to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure and as a pedagogy. Whether defining normalcy as an approximation of limits and mastery, or as renunciations, as the refusal of difference itself, Queer Theory insists on posing the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought (Britzman, 1995, p.154).

On top of this, Luhmann (1998, p.142) adds that queer education "claims for subversion and provocative interference with the production of normalcy [...] for interventions in normalcy". Hence, queer pedagogy is based on queer theory's principles: in what follows, I clarify the term

⁷⁵ "Gender – and the reflection on gender relationships – allows one to consider a multiple set of meanings and experiences. Looking through gender identification, we can access the different possibilities that determine our identities. In educational practices, it is necessary to find methods to deconstruct the dominant models, and also to find ways to think of gender as a social construction in order to develop conscious processes. This gives us a sense of complexity, in its attempt to account for the cultural and intercultural field, and bodily and sexual difference, which are a resource and not a deficiency" (My translation).

‘queer’ by further connecting it to pedagogy. In so doing, I follow that stream within queer theories that accounts for ‘queer’ as a zone of identitarian possibilities against normalcy: queer is a deconstructive practice for resisting the monoliths of normalcy (Sedgwich, 1993). Furthermore, queer began as a challenge to essentialist constructions of gay identity but, in opposition to a gay and lesbian identity, queer identity is not based on the belief in a stable truth or reality (Dowson, 2000). Accordingly, as Halperin (1995) notices, ‘queer’ does not name any natural kind, nor does it refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to norms. “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers” (Halperin, 1995, p.62). Therefore, queer theory is not like any other theory in the scientific acceptance of the term, in that it does not provide a system of ideas used to explain something and it does not offer “a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative” (Halperin, 1995, p.62). Indeed, by stemming from a postmodernist and post-structuralist foundation and a social reform movement, the principle of queer theory is to dissemble common beliefs about gender and sexuality and then to subvert the broad process of normalization. Indeed, it “takes on various shapes, risks, ambitions and ambivalences in various contexts” (Berlant and Warner, 1995, p.343) and in so doing it allows for:

A reordering [of] the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logic of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community – for recruiting, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire (Halperin, 1995, p.62).

Accordingly, ‘queer’ endeavours to reject all categorizations as limiting and labelled by dominant power structures: it extends to anyone who feels their position – in terms of sexuality, gender, race, class, intellectual, cultural location – to be marginalised. In such a way, the queer position I focus on goes beyond exploring aspects of gay and lesbian identity and “it “questions taken for granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation” (Meyer, 2007, p.15). In other words, it enquires the numerous positions covering a multiplicity of possibilities, which are all valid. Following Luhmann (1998, p.151) “queer tries to interrupt these modes of making selves and making sense by refusing stable identities and by producing new identifications that lie outside stable binary models of gender and sexuality”. Broadly speaking, the purpose of queer is to break down the traditional conceptions of what is normal and what is deviant: “its tactics are to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privilege of normality” (Berlant and Freeman, 1992, p.152). Thereby, queer designates a “non-fixed organization of resistances” that calls for transcending mainstream politics and for including all those who are against any set conceptions of sex, gender, sexuality and power (Kirsch, 2000). It follows that “queer speaks to the fluidity and interconnectedness of race, gender, and class, of sexual practices and bodies”

(Luhmann, 1988, p.146). For the scholar Annamarie Jagose, whose well known *Queer Theory* (1998) is an influential text:

Queer is very much a category in the process of formation [...] It is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics (Jagose, 1998, pp.2-3).

Despite its impossibility to be defined – and it is precisely here that its potential lies – queer occupies a “zone of possibilities” (Jagose, 1998, p.3) that brings incoherence into the allegedly stable identitarian categories. These comments on ‘queerness’ clarify my use of queer in the context of education: “so the question remains – what could be made “queer” about pedagogy?” (Bryson, de Castel, 1993, p.298). Queering education – in my case through an alternative method of reading classical myths – does not involve looking for homosexuality in the texts, or any other supposed ‘deviant’ behaviour for that matter. Instead, queering education through a feministqueer method of reading means to distance oneself from essentialist and normative constructions of alleged heterosexuality and of fixed gender identities. In dealing with classical myths, this can be translated into the destabilization of the normative discourses which repeat heteronormative, patriarchal and gender binary assumptions. In other words, queer pedagogy must necessarily confront and break down the presumptions of heteronormativity and the female/male binary as dominating the institutionalized understandings of myths: queer theory offers a lens through which to transgress and to subvert heteronormative, sex/gender dichotomies in order to provide new figurations, to see the world differently. More generally, it offers the means to “deconstruct binaries central to Western modes of meaning making [out of myths], learning [...] and doing politics” (Luhmann, 1988, p.151).

Queer pedagogy thus considers knowledge as an interminable inquiry of normative patterns: it addresses the problem of how certain identifications are normalized and how they can be refused. In relation to this notion of queer knowledge as a continuously questioning knowledge – which brings attention to non-normative notions of identity – I draw on the works of Sandra Harding who, concerning standpoint methodology, underscores the importance of the questioning practice. In her analysis, Harding (1993, p.78) points out that the experiences of “marginalized peoples are not the answers to questions arising either inside or outside those lives, though they are necessary to asking the best questions”. Accordingly, the queer approach to educational methodologies provides a way to not entrap analysis within normalizing boundaries, but rather to recognize that knowledge is an infinite process of inquiry that is impossible to put in closed and institutional borders. As Luhmann (1988, p.153) puts, nowadays the focus of pedagogy begins to “shift from transmission strategies to an inquiry into the conditions for understanding, or refusing, knowledge”. Accordingly, in the use that I make of queer pedagogy, it does not appear as the

application of queer theory to pedagogy, nor the use of pedagogy for the transmission of queer knowledge; rather, it becomes my tool of inquiry: in analyzing the reading of myths, queer pedagogy gives me the tools to question how identifications, within the myth, are formed and sometimes rejected; furthermore, it allows to consider the representations deriving from myths as temporal and inclusive of multiple possibilities.

In such a way, queering education attempts ‘to decolonize knowledge’ (Smith, 2013; Hunt, Holmes, 2015)⁷⁶ from normative appropriation, in order to unsettle female/male hierarchies and to criticize identitarian categories presented as stable, unitary and institutional. In particular, queering educative methods aims at spoiling and transgressing both coherent, gendered configurations and the need for a clear arrangement of dichotomous, gender difference. As I will put into practice in my feministqueer reading of *Antigonick*, the particular focus of my method consists of providing a means to undo gender – meant as the hierarchical tool for controlling identities and the consideration of identities as only male/female – and thus, it offers new possibilities of ‘viability’ (Butler, 2004). Accordingly, a queer approach teaches how to dismantle the solidity of ‘authentic’ categories: sexual and gender identity come to be framed as unstable, fluid and incoherent because they are situated within the power plays of systems of signification, rather than within a language of biological determinism. In the process of undoing gender, a queer education gathers gender’s fragments, giving space and possibility to those identities which live in its cracks. In this respect, according to Judith Butler in *Undoing gender* (2004), only by becoming undone, gender becomes emancipatory; otherwise, normative conceptions of gender neutralize the subject, threatening their viability:

The experience of normative constriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater liveability as its aim (Butler, 2004, p.1).

Hence, what I am mainly interested in about queer pedagogy is that it offers new, multi-functional methods through the interruption rather than the repetition of what gender normative identity imposes. In other words, it gives rise to a pedagogical movement towards a cultural change in the understanding the female/male binary and, more generally, of the normal/deviant relation. In this regard, queer education contests and undoes the logic of institutional laws based on heteronormativity and it looks for educational practices able to unmask gender norms as non-natural and non-normal: gender normalizing representations become central to this struggle. According to

⁷⁶Some scholars have used the expressions: “coalitional queer politics”, “queer intersectionality”, and/or “postcolonial queer” (Hunt and Holmes, 2015, p.156) to explain the notion of decolonial queer politics. Indeed, “A decolonial queer politic is not only anti-normative, but actively engages with anti-colonial, critical race and Indigenous theories and geopolitical issues such as imperialism, and nationalism” (Hunt and Holmes, 2015, p.156). Here I borrow the expression ‘decolonizing queer pedagogy’ to refer to a pedagogy that seeks to queer the ‘colonial’ gender and sexual categories it relies on.

Audrey Thomson (2006), ‘normal as natural’ is the relation to deconstruct; indeed, in order to approach this anti-normalcy project, queer education must firstly pursue the critical strategy of denaturalization: that is, they must show how gender and sexual identities are not natural and already given, but rather they are entirely socially constructed within particular socio-historical contexts and as hierarchical sides of power relations. Within the context of educational methods, to point to normalcy as an exorbitant construction works towards the inclusion of those considered as ‘others’, and then the improvement of individual and communitarian emancipation. Hence, queering education can be translated into disrupting naturalizing – and, thus, normalizing – patterns in both contents and learning methodologies. In other words, undoing normalizing gender roles – that perpetuate the gender binary – becomes the first goal within my queer education project concerned with self-formation: the feministqueer reading method I propose aims at constructing non-traditional exercises to examine identity, gender and issues of power and privilege. Furthermore, it aims at creating knowledge about inclusiveness and an understanding of difference as enriching multiplicity. Accordingly, a queer pedagogy looks with scepticism at the processes of identity construction and, as Deborah Britzman (1995) states in her essay “Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight”, it becomes concerned with normalcy-immanent exclusion. Indeed, if queer education deals with the practice of deconstructing normalcy, then it is obviously not confined only to queer subjects. Indeed, very importantly, the refusal of any normalization – be it racist, sexist, classist or else – comes to be part of the queer agenda. In other words, queer pedagogy aims at the infinite proliferation of multiple identifications (Thomson, 2006). In such a general perspective of deconstructing normalizations, Thompson (2006) calls for queer theory to rethink education as teaching and learning inclusive methods and actions. In her work, she problematizes the very notion of upending ‘authentic’ categories and the breakdown of binaries meant as natural: a queer approach to education deals with the production of knowledge about the complexities and contradictions of identity formation, beyond any dualisms. On this subject, Mary Bryson and Susanne de Castel (1993) consider queer pedagogy as a means to queer relations in knowledge production:

Queer pedagogy could refer to the deliberate production of queer relations and to the production of subjectivities as deviant performance – that is to say, to a kind of postmodern carnivalesque pedagogy of the underworld (Bryson, de Castel, 1993, p.299).

Queer pedagogy can thus be a useful approach to the purpose of stimulating and promoting anti-normative and performative⁷⁷ knowledge: queer education is an attempt to move away from what has been normalized and naturalized by dominant political institutions. Indeed, in her essay,

⁷⁷As I will show in the last chapter, in using this term, I follow Judith Butler’s notion of queer performativity (1993). Here I refer in particular to knowledge production that can challenge the normal one.

Britzman (1995) argues that a queer educational project sees normativity as a renunciation, as a refusal of difference in itself and, thus, generally as a socio-political construction that must be eradicated. For this purpose, queer theory attempts to uncover what has been refused: “queer theory offers education techniques to make sense and remark upon what it [queer meaning] dismisses or cannot bear to know” (Britzman, 1995, p.154). Indeed, a politics of queer education strives to unravel the mechanism of naturalization by way of extending identities beyond fixed categories, by merging traditional assumptions and by creating a type of knowledge that includes the multiplicity of possibilities. In terms of strategy, it deals with ambiguity and hybridity rather than the fixity characterizing formal knowledge and normative categories. As such, queer pedagogy is a transforming education based on alternative methods, since it challenges stereotypical methods by crossing the gender binary:

Educare a un sapere trasformativo significa, dunque, lavorare attivamente per scardinare questi stereotipi e offrire a ragazze e ragazzi conoscenze ed epistemologie plurali che legittimano tutte le forme di conoscenza e di relazione al di fuori delle dicotomie classiche e che siano in grado di indicare percorsi alternativi di studio e di lavoro che possano andare oltre i tradizionali modelli di genere e soprattutto il più vicino possibile ai propri desideri e alle proprie attitudini (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi, 2010, p.25)⁷⁸.

Thus, a queer pedagogy deals with the subversion of conventional approaches: “subversive practices have to overwhelm the capacity to read, challenge conventions of reading, and demand new possibilities of reading” (Butler, 1993, p. 20). Accordingly, I prompt such a ‘subversive’ process on three levels: with regards to the curricula, in learning and teaching methods and, finally, in the emancipation of ways of thinking. In other words, my feministqueer approach aims at challenging the processes of normalizations, moving from contents and reading methods, so as to include (gender) possibilities in real life. Moreover, methodologically speaking, a queer approach proposes an active engagement with the examined texts: “the queer pedagogy that I imagine engages students in a conversation about how textual positions are being taken up or refused” (Luhmann, 2010, p.153). As a consequence, this tendency to resist pre-given positions enables minds to cross the borders of what is normal towards a “dialogue across differences” (Kaplan, 1992).

Following the above arguments, since normativity and gender binary approaches have long occupied a central position in the practice of reading classics, I advocate an entirely new attitude, to which I think queer theory can provide some directions: I call for challenging the already given order and giving space to multiple readings of gender patterns. For this reason, I propose a

⁷⁸ “To educate to a transformative knowledge means to work hard to remove these stereotypes and to offer students several epistemologies that legitimize all forms of knowledges and relationships beyond the classic dichotomies. It means to bring forth alternative pathways for studying and working, which can go beyond the traditional gender models, while being as close as possible to one’s own desires and skills” (My translation).

feministqueer method of reading classical myths – as I will practice in reading *Antigonick* – as a process of questioning normative knowledge. Indeed, queer theory becomes for me a way to face Antigone’s myth and to ask myself: what identifications are at stake in institutional understandings? What structures these representations? How have they become normal? What prevents them? In other words, in bringing a queer-pedagogical approach to my understanding of Antigone’s myth, I explore how normalizing identifications have been taken up or refused and then I propose to intervene on normalcy, by undoing the fixity of gender categorizations. Therefore, rather than assuming and affirming given identities, the feministqueer method concerns itself with how identifications are embraced or denied through the reading process. Finally, it seems imperative to me to explore the feministqueer educational practice, in order to offer alternative methodological opportunities. Hopefully, feministqueer reading encourages an ethical process by refusing the risks of normalizing repetitions and by breaking down the female-male binary logic, thus undermining normative mechanisms: this is, indeed, the main aim of my research.

3.3 Classical myth: a site of possibilities⁷⁹

In this section, I expound on the reasons why I think that ancient Greek myths can have a founding role in fostering a non-normative education. My interest in engaging with classical myths comes primarily from my academic experience and my own curiosity. Indeed, in school I was taught to analyse classical myths through their canonical interpretations: such a patriarchal, normative and monolithic perspective has made myths into master narratives that offer universal truths to identify with.

One of the key functions of master narratives is that they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience [...] They become the vehicle through which we comprehend not only the stories of others, but crucially of ourselves as well. For ultimately, the power of master narratives derives from internalization. Wittingly or unwittingly we become the stories we know and the master narrative is reproduced (Andrews, 2004b, p.1).

Indeed, the internalization of normative understandings of myths has always made me question the unique understanding that eclipses other possibilities. Furthermore, it made me acknowledge a discrepancy between what institutional readings have taught me and the multiplicity that a myth can actually convey. Although myths have been generally interpreted⁸⁰ through a

⁷⁹Hooks, in discussing engaged education, refers to the classrooms as a location of possibilities: “the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibilities” (1994, p.207). Following her thought, I made a similar consideration, by arguing that classic myths can be a site of possibilities. In addition, I play with this term as it is understood in queer theory. According to Elizabeth J. Meyer (2007, p.15), queer theory “seeks to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight”. Thus, I employ the term ‘possibility’, in reference to classic myths, by merging both hooks’ terminology and the vocabulary of queer theory.

⁸⁰I refer particularly to formal interpretations, readings and analyses of classic myths.

(gender) binary and (hetero)normative gaze, in order to support the stereotypes and the power relations imposed by the hegemonic system, I think that they actually fit more than a univocal and normalizing reading. In ancient Greek culture, the term ‘myth’⁸¹ (μῦθος) indicates a true story, a discourse upon the truth⁸²; in Greek society, myths had a gnoseological, controlling and instructive function: they taught to distinguish between wrong and proper behaviour. Indeed, myths are stories, and according to the first, traditional function of stories, “they direct us to what is good and what is wrong, and in doing so shape our subjectivities and choices for action” (McKenzie and Lafrance, 2014, p.3). As the philologist Joseph Campbell (1988) points out, while folk tales and fairy tales exist purely for entertainment, myths have always been meant for use as a source of instruction. In addition, he refers to myths as presenting human archetypes that can help understand and contextualize human experience. According to him, myths have the potential to be a useful component of any educational programme, because they deal with ethical, moral, religious and political issues that can be analyzed and either incorporated or refused. Thus, classical myths have acquired a certain degree of authority because of their epistemological potential to deliver stories aimed at re-signifying real life.

On this subject, Károly Kerényi, one of the founders of modern studies in Greek mythology, in the introduction to the Italian version of *The Heroes of the Greeks*⁸³ (1963), describes Thomas Mann’s speech on the potential of myths in his conference in 1936 about “Freud e l’avvenire” (Kerényi, 1963, p.8). Thomas Mann noted that myths offer a documentation of and for

⁸¹ It is necessary to clarify the use of both the terms myth and tragedy within ancient Greek literature. I use the word ‘myth’ to refer to mythical representations and stories; while I use the term ‘tragedy’ to talk about a heroic story that might contain a myth: Greek tragedy was the first artistic medium for ancient myths and it often determined canonical versions of myth (Budzowska and Czerwinska, 2015). In addition, as professor Kerényi argues: “the cult and the myth of the hero contain Tragedy in germ, not only as regards its material, its formative principle and its significance, but also in time. Attic Tragedy attaches itself to the cult and the mythology of heroes” (1974, p.14). Moreover, according to Jean-Pierre Vernant, the tragic character ought to lend itself to what is required by the action, namely to the requirements of the myth, of which tragedy is an imitation (1976). Therefore, the majority of ancient Greek myths were firstly oral, but they reached us in their written form thanks to tragedies. Myth and tragedy are a representation of an action that is enacted by agents, who are characterized in both character and thought (Halliwell, 1987, p. 37). As far as such a distinction is concerned, Aristotle in *The Poetics* argues that tragedy is more powerful than narration – as it is myth itself – because it provokes the *catharsis* of emotions: “[tragedy lies] in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative – and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the catharsis of such emotions” (*Poetics* 6, 1449b24-8). In my opinion, it is necessary to make a further distinction: it is correct to use the term tragedy when we refer to a precise written text; instead, when we refer only to a story, namely to a narration that has travelled over centuries in several forms, – without references to a precise play and a precise playwright – it is more correct to use the term myth. However, I think that both myth and drama explore the mechanisms through which an individual, however heroic he/she may be, is brought to his/her downfall. In this way, it lays bare the network of contradictory forces that assail all human beings, given that, not only in Greek society but in all societies and cultures, tensions and conflicts are inevitable. The scope of myth and tragedy is such that it carries within itself a kind of knowledge or a theory concerning the illogical thought that governs the order of human activities (Chanter, Kirkland, 2014). In my research I will use the term myth – even in relation to my analysis of the character of Antigone – because I do not refer directly to Sophocles’ tragedy, but rather to Antigone’s myth – as it has been translated and transformed by Anne Carson. Moreover, I use the verb ‘read’ myths, referring to the practice of analyzing the texts which recount the myths.

⁸² The term first appears in the *Odyssey* and derives from the verb μυθολογεῖω (*Odisea* XII, 451): to narrate a true story.

⁸³ *Gli dei e gli eroi della Grecia* (1963).

humanity through figurative representations; for this reason, myths and mythology are so interesting for psychology (1963). Embracing this argument, I do not rest on the function of myth in the ancient Greek cultural context; rather, I want to consider their contemporary potential, as a medium which delivers identitarian possibilities. Even though they have lost their function as “fondazione di vita”⁸⁴ (Kerényi, 1963, 8), classical myths still have the power to influence critical thought and action in the present via the re-evaluation of the identitarian figurations they offer. Thereby, classical myths can create a bridge between the knowledge of the past and the knowledge of the present; in this respect, I find what Sara Ahmed (2002) argues about the multiplicity of pasts influencing the present very illuminating:

It is through attending to the multiplicity of the pasts that are never simply behind us, through the traces they leave in the encounters we have in the present, that we can open up the promise of the non yet (Ahmed, 2002, p.559).

According to this notion of ‘pasts’, I think that myths – as stories belonging to the past – give the possibility to think of ‘non-yet’ identifications and possibilities in the present, through the multiplicity of the characters populating past stories. In this respect, I do not want to read myths in relation to their original context of development; rather, I situate myths, as a reader, at the heart of current times to rethink the meaning of contemporary identifications through past figurations. In other words, I attempt to engage with myths as a pedagogical tool to reflect on contemporary relationships and identitarian multiplicity, while applying a contemporary and inclusive gaze to past representations. In this regard, the great potential of myth lies in its capacity to travel over times and space, and this has contributed to the confirmation of its authoritative *status*. Over the centuries, classical myths have been read and interpreted according to time and space positioning: the time-space malleability of myths allows for different interpretations depending on different readers. Accordingly, to bring myths into the contemporary Italian context and to look at them from a critical gaze is a pedagogical practice that grants them new socio-cultural value. In this respect, in their article “Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect” (1993), Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell refer to postmodernist practices of moving texts from one context to another in order to propose alternative values to received contents:

Postmodernist practices of ‘recycling’ [...] salvage icons, images, and artefacts resurrected from within their original socio-historical context and re-inserted into another context, within which this “detritus” takes on a new, significantly greater cultural value. It is postmodernism’s characteristic montage of previously unconnected events, its unprecedented and often unlikely juxtapositions of what, in its original context, might conversely have been at best commonplace, ordinary, seemingly without value, which we see instantiated in these pedagogical tactics (Bryson, de Castell, 1993, p.293).

In such “postmodern transvaluation of values” (Bryson, de Castell 1993, p.293), myths become capable of articulating sophisticated and critical theories in opposition to conventional

⁸⁴ “Myth is the foundation of life” (My translation).

ones. Indeed, the hetero-normative, binary and patriarchal interpretation of myths has become predominant and has simultaneously relegated ambiguous or non-conformist representations, which actually belong to the myth itself, to its margins: this trend needs urgently to be inverted. Given that these dominant frames can prove harmful, they can “constrain and squeeze our choices” (Gavey, 2011, p.185) and, above all, they can “limit the possibility of individualized role” (Spreckles, 2001, p.207), I propose a critical feministqueer ‘appropriation’ of classical myths, taking advantages of the epistemological role of myths and aiming at undoing normalizing readings. Consequently, disrupting the normative readings of myths provides a pedagogical intent; indeed, undoing the epistemological principles attached to myths – which are foregrounded in the hetero-normative, female/male paradigm – teaches how to undo the normative narratives which structure societies. In what follows, I elucidate the reasons why I firmly believe in the pedagogical potentiality of myths: firstly, they represent a site where the repetition of normative interpretations has been consolidated over time and, thus, the ideal place in which to start a deconstruction; secondly, they are a source of alternative possibilities; and finally, they can be a useful tool for children’s non-formal education. Hence, the following reflections derive from the assumption that normative and formal readings of myths have entrapped them in heteronormative and (gender) binary cages, in the absence of which, myths could have had delivered highly ambiguous and multiple patterns of identifications. Thus, in order to be a conscious reader of myths, I believe it necessary to look at myths through an alternative feministqueer lens that can pick up on their hybridity.

As far as my first point is concerned – regarding myth as a site of normative reading – myths are still used, especially in Italian curricula, from primary school onwards, as a medium to convey ethical behaviours, relationships and moral values. Indeed, the classical world’s heritage has had a strong impact on the Italian language and culture, and ancient myths in particular are considered a source of examples and answers. Accordingly, I firmly believe that myths can be a great pedagogical tool, insofar as they reproduce human characters with human vulnerabilities and strengths; nonetheless, in order to accomplish this instructive goal, the lens through which they are approached has to be renewed and situated. As stated before, classical myths were and still are the site of normative and normalizing readings. For this reason, indeed, traditional analyses of classical myths have contributed to the divulgation of normalized conceptions of the body, identity and relationships: the female/male binary; the notion of the female as private and the male as public; the idea of family as naturally heteronormative and mirroring the female/male binary; and so on. Thus, formal readings of myths have become ‘master stories’, which work for the dominant order and inhibit inquiry:

They work on (and are worked on by) social and political forces, so that they reach the status of common sense, they become naturalized and normalized, thereby serving to maintain the status quo as vehicles of dominant ideologies (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance, 2014, p.3).

In this way, classical myths have been a useful tool to secure the (hetero)normative, patriarchal, binary and dominant order. Thus, in order to undo such narratives and to engender a fluid form of knowledge, it is necessary to stop citing the ‘authentic’⁸⁵ readings so as to give space to alternative and inclusive discourses and identifications. In other words, repeating institutional readings of myths has helped confirm normalizing and oppressing patterns which then have diffused ‘normal’ models of relational bonds: ‘normal’ families, state, love, femininity and masculinity⁸⁶. Unsurprisingly, the interpretations of myths that have gained authority in institutional curricula are those inspired by binary, patriarchal and normative politics, which tend to defend themselves through the circulation of normalizing learning instruments. Indeed, institutional curricula ask the student/learner to read myths in ways which reinforce the dominant order. Thus, by pushing students to submit to the authority of classical myths, official curricula are actually asking them to submit to the institutional interpretations of myths, without even questioning them: this submission to normative interpretations of myths represents the submission to the dominant order itself. It follows that myths are the proper site in which to interrogate the biases of domination; furthermore, they are a useful source from where to begin the struggle against authority as normativity. In sum, myths are a very fruitful site for resisting the demands of authority of normative reading and, consequently, for learning how to reject submission as such. Indeed, continuing to interpret myths through a normative and binary lens means to agree to repeating the hegemonic norm, by giving it authority and consequently supporting a sort of naturalization of the norm itself. Indeed, such a repetition makes normative interpretations universally valid, since it obtains a sort of naturalizing effect, inducing one to think that as myths have always been analyzed through a normative lens, this must shed light on their real meaning. Put simply, patriarchal and binary discourses applied to past narrations have authorized the diffusion of the same narratives in the present; however, to interrupt the repetition of norms requires the deconstruction of such discourses, so as to open space for new, inclusive and beyond-binary narratives.

⁸⁵With the term ‘authentic’, I refer to readings repeated by the institutional curricula, which have gained the status of unique and original interpretations.

⁸⁶In this paragraph, I use words such as repetition, reiteration, citation, norm and normality to recall Butler’s theory of gender performativity (1990, 1993, 2004). Here, I only intend to echo Butler’s theory of performativity, and of undoing ‘gender’ and ‘normativities’. I draw on Butler’s thoughts about the repetition of norm that makes it become natural (when it is not brought to its excess so as to parody the norm itself). In particular, Butler argues that gender and sex are “a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms” (Butler, 1993, p.10). Therefore, here I explain the repetition of normative readings of myths by citing Butler’s theory of norms reiteration as a way to perpetuate and to secure normative readings. However, I will delve deeper into these theories in the last chapter, during my analysis of *Antigonick*.

Engaging with myths from a non-binary gaze proves thus to be a methodological strategy useful in undermining the perpetuation of imposed normative analysis. More precisely, my concern is to deconstruct the either/or rhetoric that does not necessarily belong to myths, so as to explore a logic without borders and thus without exclusions. Indeed, I do not believe that an interpretation of a myth can be considered correct or incorrect; rather, it is possible to bring forth either normative and closed analyses or multiple and inclusive readings. In sum, since they have been for a long time a place of normativity, classical myths represent now a fertile site in which to destabilize normative and normalizing ways of thinking and acting. As a consequence, they are the ideal form of narrative one can use to demonstrate that normative patterns are social constructions rather than natural issues: indeed, these are applied to myths, rather than being ‘natural’ features, inherent in the myths themselves. Thus, classical myths permit to interrupt the repetition of dominating roles and ‘normal’ representations, by raising knowledge from practices that explore patterns of normalcy: this is to me the foundation of a feministqueer reading method.

The second point of my argument considers myths as a source of identitarian possibilities: classical myths travel over ages and cultures, so as they have an a-temporal and a-spatial dimension that triggers the imagination and thus helps to discover new possibilities. Jean Paul Vernant in *Myths and Tragedy* (1979, p.247) talks about the “ transhistoricity” that results from the fact that myth “lays bare the network of contradictory forces that assail all human being, given that [...] in all societies and culture, tensions and conflicts are inevitable”. In my opinion, trans-temporality and trans-spatiality characterize myths and, therefore, the act of looking back on familiar myths can raise queries; it can help to look for ourselves and, possibly, to find ourselves (Woolf, 1988). In fact, “one may note phenomena of mythical signatures’ transfer in space and time of ancient, modern and postmodern culture” (Budzowska and Czerwinska, 2015, p.9); for this reason, according to Campbell, myths are a source of potentialities:

As a result, myths can offer clues to the potentialities – spiritual, intellectual, emotional, personal, and I argue, professional – within us, providing insight into what we are capable of being, knowing, and experiencing (Campbell, 1988, p.5).

On top of this, reaching as they do over several epochs and spaces, myths can suggest situated resignifications, which differ in relation to different time-space positionalities and incorporations – namely the reader’s appropriation – and offer several examples of behaviors.

I miti hanno sempre due fondamentali chiavi di lettura, che non devono essere gerarchicamente opposte; l’interpretazione storico-filologica che ci permette di inquadrare la vicenda all’interno del panorama simbolico del tempo, quella che invece diamo noi oggi [...] è una reinterpretazione, non meno necessaria e valida. L’essenza dei miti sta infatti proprio nella risignificazione incessante, nel rivolgersi sempre alla storia con doppio sguardo. È così che si sono costituiti, per stratificazione, ed è così che assolvono alla loro funzione fondamentale di

serbatoio del simbolico e dell'immaginario per ogni società e generazione (De Simone, 2010, p.16)⁸⁷.

I personally look at classical myths as a means to resignify and to question the performativity⁸⁸ and the contingency of gender. Indeed, myths support and transmit normative gender roles because they have been institutionally read through a normative lens, which has always referred them to their original context. More precisely, myths have institutionally been read through a binary and normative lens that has been justified insofar as it mirrors the myths' original gender relations. In such a way, the characters and the relations within myths have been 'normally' interpreted through an either/or logic: there is always a male character opposed to a female character and they both have very different, hierarchical roles. In this respect, they provide a useful source in answering the question that Genevieve Lloyd raises in *The Man of Reason* (2004, XIII): "How does symbolic maleness and femaleness interact with the cultural formation of gender identity?" In this respect, I believe that the normative readings of classical myths have brought to light a differential set of gender roles that oppose the male and female categories in a hierarchical way. Nonetheless, if we acknowledge myths' potential to travel as having affected even our contemporary world⁸⁹, and, thus, if we re-consider their appropriation, we can provide alternative gender identifications. Indeed, while reading we can undo the gender fixity that has been attributed to myths by institutional readings. In such a way, classic myth can become the proper site in which to question gender fixity and to reveal its fluid possibilities.

For example, in order to analyze the myth of Antigone and to reach what it can still teach to my society, I do not focus on understanding it according to its social and political context of development: i.e., through the relational and identitarian gender norms that regulated Greek society in 441 BC. On this point, Ida Dominijanni, in her essay "Antigone, ancora" (2004), points out that:

Per quanto Antigone possa rappresentare la soggettività che si oppone alla logica del potere (maschile) come monopolio del pensare legittimo e della legge, tale lettura rischia di risultare un po' anacronistica, dal momento che i tempi attuali registrano sia una decisa incrinatura del ruolo dello Stato come rappresentante della legalità, sia una progressiva assimilazione del femminile allo Stato stesso, disegnando un panorama assai più indefinito e complesso rispetto alla società greca che produsse la tragedia⁹⁰ (Dominijanni, 2004, qtd. in Mapelli).

⁸⁷ Myths have always had two interpretations, which are not hierarchically opposed. On one hand, the historical-philological interpretation that places the myth in the symbolic panorama of its own time. On the other, the interpretations we give today [...] which consist of a re-interpretation, no less necessary or valid. Myth's essence lies in its continuous resignification, and in its capacity to look at history with a twofold gaze. Indeed, it has been shaped itself through stratification and, for this reason, it provides an a-temporal and a-spatial symbol and imaginary" (My translation).

⁸⁸ In the last chapter, I expound on the concept of 'performativity', following Butler's analysis (1993).

⁸⁹ I have already made clear that this research is based on my academic experience of approaching myths and, thus, on the Italian context, therefore the context I refer to is the Italian one.

⁹⁰ "Although Antigone may represent the subject in opposition to the (masculine) logic of power – the one in charge of law and reason – this reading risks being anachronistic. In fact, nowadays there is often a gap between the State and the law, and a progressive assimilation of the feminine sphere within the State. Therefore, a more undefined and complex scenario than the Greek panorama in which the play developed is at stake." (My translation).

Adding to these reflections on the anachronistic character of readings that remain fixed within temporal limits, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1986), Benjamin insists that the narrations from the past have to be read through an awareness of their constant return and transformations in the present.

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ [...] It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger [...] The original lives on only via transformation in, and into, the language of the present (Benjamin, 1968b, p.255, p.77).

In other words, Benjamin advocates an approach to the past that considers its defining and irreducible relation to the present. Thus, positing either Antigone’s myth or Sophocles’ play in a fixed, stable and distant past, which is thought of merely as it ‘really was’, is an action that does not allow to grasp the actualization of the past. In this respect, in *The Returns of Antigone* (2014, p.20) Tina Chanter and Sean Kirkland argue that:

Yes, Antigone lives on. Always pushing beyond the spatiotemporal coordinates that define her original incarnation, her continual rebirths delineating a multiply determined legacy. Beyond the historical specification Sophocles gives her in the fifth century BC, beyond the geographical confines of her literary and theatrical birthplace, beyond Thebes and Athens, she continues to defy expectations.

In line with this analysis, I intend to appropriate⁹¹ the myth, assimilate it to my surroundings and read it through a feministqueer gaze which gives voice to its contemporary possibilities. Such a process allows me to question the universal truths forced on myths, but first and foremost to underscore the possible performativity and contingency of gender identifications. In conclusion, the travelling potential of myths makes them a source of possibilities. Thus, reading them from another, inclusive gaze is a way of undoing gender and, thus, of revealing the performativity of gender itself; it is a way to confirm the mutability and the possibilities of gender identities beyond the binary:

Svelare il carattere appreso e contingente di ogni performance di genere significa anche capire che si può cambiare, che il proprio destino di donna o uomo ha sì radici profonde, riconoscibili in una storia sociale e culturale che nel tempo ha reso i generi quali sono, ma che ruoli, culture e scelte individuali e collettive, come la stessa storia dimostra – soprattutto quella a noi più vicina – mutano e si possono mutare e che se ne può essere protagonisti e protagoniste (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi, 2010, p.22)⁹².

Myths stimulate imagination and creativity, and this is required in order to create alternative and beyond boundaries knowledge. “Moreover, fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it

⁹¹ Butler raises the issue regarding acts of appropriation “that risk a repetition of the self-aggrandizing gesture of phallogocentrism, colonizing under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that totalizing concept into question” (2007, p.18). However, the appropriation I call for, since it is rooted in the situatedness of the reader, does not run the risk of universalizing – and this constitutes the phallogocentric error – nor does it claim to provide a monolithic truth.

⁹² “To reveal the contingent character of any gender performance means to understand that it is possible to change things and that our fate as female or male beings is rooted in a historical background that has made genders as they are nowadays. Nonetheless, roles, culture and personal and collective choices, as history reveals – mainly, very recent history – change events and we can be the protagonists of this change” (my translation).

moves beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility” (Butler, 2004, p.29). Thus, if we want to learn from myths and bring them to life, it is important to acknowledge their travelling potential and to stop trying to derive one monolithic truth out of them; this process will then set the imagination free. Indeed, following Butler’s thought (2004, p.29), imagination, stimulated by myths, “is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home”. Thus, to distance oneself from the static features that normative readings identify in myths means to embrace the possibility myths have to offer alternatives to normative meanings; and to resist and question the idea that there is only one appropriate meaning in each myth: this awareness allows to interrogate the characters and relationships contained in myths without repeating the (gender) binary logic. In such a way, myths can be a pedagogical means to develop non-hierarchical, non-binary, non-heterosexual and non-normative representations. For this reason, classical myths can become a source of multiple possibilities, both imaginative and identitarian: by intrinsically containing multiple possibilities, they encourage us to recognize these alternatives in our surroundings. Thus, we can also “understand ourselves (at least in part) as situated in a significant relation to the tradition that arose with the ancient Greeks and that has unfolded through European culture over the millennia down to the present” (Chanter and Kirkland, 2014, p.1). In conclusion, my last argument regards the fact that, once freed of the normative layers that have been attached to them, myths can have a pedagogical role in children’s education: opening minds to multiplicity and different desires. In other words, non-normative representations of classical myths can be used as a method to teach difference, identitarian possibilities and non-normative relations, in order to free children from the binary logic, which among two terms imposes one as the normal and the other as the abject.

In sum, I have stressed the relevance of classical myths because I have always had the feeling that they can teach me much more than what normative understandings underscore; they can tell me more than what I learned by reading them as master narratives enforcing powers relations. I propose to read classical myths as a source of new possibilities, through a gaze differing from the binary one, in order to engage with alternative, intersectional and inclusive patterns. This process does not intend to impose on myths representations that do not belong to them; rather, it attempts to unmask and undo the patterns that have been attributed to myths by dominant and normative understandings. Hence, due to their appropriation by normalizing curricula and, furthermore, due to their travelling meanings, myths can be a site for challenging the disciplining effects of linear and traditional readings. Moreover, they represent a site in which to resist naturalizing figurations and to unravel alternative, powerful tropes and new gender possibilities. On top of this, given that classical

myths have often been considered as conveying the truth, they represent an ideal locus of resistance to the idea of a universal truth. They can thus become a means of subversion and also an educational tool for creating inclusive, unbiased and inquiring knowledge. Thus, by approaching them from a feministqueer gaze, classical myths become a source of possibilities that encourage a new awareness; a place where we have the opportunity to work towards inclusiveness, and to demand of our-selves an openness of mind and heart that permits us to face our surroundings beyond binaries and identitarian boundaries. In this respect, connecting the potential of myths to hooks' reflections on teaching to transgress, I think that myths can be a medium for a renewal and reformulation of reading methods. I strongly believe that myths are a field of possibility, in which we have the chance "to know beyond the binaries of what is acceptable, so that we can create new visions [...] to transgress. It is that movement that makes education a practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p.12). Accordingly, reading classical myths with a feministqueer method can be a way to learn by crossing binaries, and to transgress the normative readings that repeat gender dualism and role stereotypes, in order to destabilize patriarchal and hegemonic thoughts.

Η Στάσιμον⁹³

“Blessed be they whose lives do not taste of evil” (Carson, 2015, p.23)⁹⁴.

But if some god shakes your mind, the transformation arrives.

Blessed be they whose eyes can be opened to grasp the differences; whose gaze can be queered to see beyond the borders of acceptable forms and relations.

Queering the gaze is an engaged practice through which you might remove the normative lens that, during the observation process, filters the observed and gives it a normalizing and normative structure. Queering one’s own gaze represents, metaphorically, the act of dropping down the normative lens through which institutional educational systems have been taught us to see and thus, to interpret identities and relations. Queering one’s own gaze, therefore, concerns the act of making your gaze strange, alternative, complex, fluid and changeable. It means to refuse the ‘ruin’ that a binary gaze is been spreading as truth. Queering one’s own gaze means, furthermore, to endorse the multiplicity of identities throughout a multiple perspective; to allow your thought to overcome the limits that entrap gender identifications in two close binaries and, to bring the gaze to the extended space beyond such gender boundaries. In this way, the act of queering the gaze produces a queered eye able to uncover patterns of (hetero)normativity and gender binary constrictions and therefore to deconstruct them and to reconstruct inclusive meanings and open (gender) identitarian possibilities.

“but of course there is hope look here comes hope” (Carson, 2015, p.23).

Here comes hope that things can change. Queering your gaze, hope comes that you might see things differently and you might embrace the multiplicity around you. While reading, queering the gaze represents a brave action meant to overturn the (gender) binary that constrains the reading subject and the reader in a close mind-set. Queering the gaze to unveil the fluidity of the identities, hoping that something more of all our identities might be unleashed.

⁹³ In Sophocles’ play, the second *stasimon* (vv. 582-625) is the chorus’ speech about the unpredictability of human life. I reproduce here the speech of the chorus, who address the human being talking of ‘ruin’ and ‘hope’.

4. Fourth Episode

Undoing gender in reading Anne Carson's *Antigonick*. An intervention in myth's normalcy

The experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater liveability as its aim.
(Butler, 2004, p.1).

In the previous chapters, I have pointed out the steps that guide the critical reader in a feministqueer close reading practice. Such a method requires the reader to pay attention to the resistances to patterns of (gender) normalization in the myth itself and, furthermore, it implies the deconstruction-reconstruction of these resistances, in order to produce new⁹⁵ and non-binary meanings. Consequently, I have drawn on the pedagogical value of classical myths, arguing that, if they are observed through a feministqueer gaze, they offer a large set of identitarian possibilities. In this chapter, I return to Antigone's myth: firstly, I introduce the branch of the debate surrounding Antigone that analyses the heroine's character through gender constrictions, namely by drawing ideas of 'sexual difference' and, thus, binary representations from the myth itself. I mention in particular the ideas of a number of philosophers, which I consider particularly influential on my argument and useful in clarifying it. In my analysis, I will principally demonstrate how the traditional interpretations of this myth reproduce a 'sexual difference' debate that entraps Antigone in a (gender) binary dichotomy.

As a consequence, I will distance myself from sexual difference narratives by following Butler and positioning myself as a feministqueer reader inclined to focus on the queer side of Antigone's identity. In the last section, in line with my purpose of engaging with myths as a pedagogical medium to cross the gender binary, I put into practice the feministqueer method in reading Anne Carson's *Antigonick*. In this project, my feministqueer reading escapes the confines of Western philosophical speculation and it attempts to think otherwise, think beyond the logic of 'straight' culture (Chanter and Kirklands, 2014). Hence, in this chapter, I oppose my feministqueer reading of myths to the traditional readings, mirroring the long-running debate between gender and queer theories and traditional sexual difference analyses. More specifically, the debate I refer to it is the one that Rosi Braidotti very clearly elaborates in *Nomadic Subjects* (2011): the very long polemic between the beyond gender feminists and the difference-inspired feminists. Even though

⁹⁵ I adopt the term 'new' as Butler intends it in *Undoing gender* (2004). In fact, she argues about the elaboration of "a new legitimating lexicon for the gender complexity that we have been living for a long time. Because the norms governing reality have not admitted these forms to be real, we will, of necessity, call them 'new'" (2004, 31). Indeed, there are not so many readings of myths that move the heroine's identity beyond the gender binary; as a consequence, to engage with a beyond binary reading can be translated into producing 'new' meanings.

she supports a sexual difference project, Braidotti enters the debate that undergoes my feministqueer reading project thus:

Through the 1980s a polemic divided the ‘difference-inspired’ feminists, from the Anglo-American ‘gender’ opposition [...] Nowadays the antisexual difference feminist line has evolved into an argument for ‘beyond gender’ or a ‘postgender’ kind of subjectivity. This line of thought argues for the overcoming of sexual dualism and gender polarities in favour of a new, sexually undifferentiated subjectivity (Braidotti, 2011, p.140).

Therefore, rejecting dualistic thinking – as the patriarchal and institutional way of dealing with myths – and embracing a beyond dualism reading, I follow the reading steps that I have previously conceived, in order to undo the gender fixity and the gender binary conception through the myth of Antigone. In other words, I propose a feministqueer reading of Antigone aiming at freeing the myth from the gender restrictions that traditional readings have constructed upon it; furthermore, I intend to cross the ‘difference-inspired’ readings that do not grasp the identitarian space in-between the two compulsory genders. In such a way, deprived of the normative interpretations that place the mythical subject in a closed and rigid gender categorization, I disclose the myth’s queer potential: Antigone’s myth may be a pedagogical means to travel unbiased and beyond (gender) binary knowledge.

4.1 The ‘gender binary debate’ on Antigone

Ad alcune tragedie si torna, ma altre, come Antigone, sembrano tornare. Non per essere scavate e rivelare nuovi sensi, ma come allusive, rivissute. Quanto l'Antigone ricorrente nei nostri anni ci parla dell'Antigone sofoclea, e quanto invece di noi? (Rossanda, qtd. in Biondetti, 1988)⁹⁶.

Following Genevieve Lloyd in *The Man of Reason*, I contend that the traditional way of thinking the symbolic maleness and femaleness has interacted with the cultural formations and thoughts surrounding gender identity. “Ways of thinking inherited from the history of philosophy have left their mark on our unreflective ways of conceptualizing questions” (Lloyd, 2004, XIV). For this reason, it is time to formulate alternative conceptualizations to which we can now turn in order to enrich our understanding of what is conceivable for contemporary thought. Indeed, my previous studies on Sophocles’ *Antigone* revealed how the main debate around the myth of Antigone has focussed on the symbolic oppositions between maleness and femaleness – clearly based on issues of sexual difference –, which have repeated hierarchical and opposed female-male gender roles. Indeed, the traditional debate stems from two simplifications: either Antigone is seen as an

⁹⁶ “We return to some tragedies, but other, such as Antigone seems to return, not in order to be inquired and to give new significations, rather as allusive and re-experienced. To what extent does Antigone, recurring to our times, talk about the Sophocles’ play and to what extent does it speak about us?” (My translation).

empowering female character who appropriates male characteristics, such as her courage and bravery in facing death due to her own desire to enter the public, masculine sphere; or, conversely, she is considered a pious female character who embodies her symbolic femaleness and dies for the sake of her female genealogy. In other words, the feminist debate around Antigone has often attempted to deconstruct the female-male distinction by reaffirming “a new feminine, free of the disagreeable results of exclusions implicit in previous hierarchical oppositions” (Lloyd, 1994, XII). As a consequence, this debate always ends up replacing Antigone within the canonical and traditional limits: does the heroine’s behaviour determine her identity as female or male? Such a polemic fits and repeats the universalistic stance that see the conflation of the masculine to an all-encompassing paradigm and the confinement of the feminine to a secondary position of devalued ‘other’, and “it rests upon the classical system of dualistic oppositions, such as, for instance, nature/culture, active/passive, rational/irrational, and masculine/feminine” (Braidotti, 2011, p.145).

This binary mode of thinking creates binary differences, and it distributes them in a hierarchical scale of power relations. In my opinion, such a way of thinking is very problematic because it derives from a fixed notion of femininity and masculinity that distinguishes between a compulsory set of behaviours proper to women and a different one proper just to men. Such an assumption does not take into account the differences among women⁹⁷ or men, and proves essentialist and reductive in its generalizations. A number of in-depth analyses of Antigone’s figure, which focus on the compulsory sex/gender binary, have been developed, firstly by Hegel and Lacan. Other contributions, which I have identified as relevant for my discussion, have come from sexual difference philosophers such as Luce Irigaray, Rossana Rossanda and Adriana Cavarero⁹⁸. Therefore, in what follows I will briefly outline the main issues regarding Antigone’s character that have been raised by these philosophers; in so doing, I intend to give examples supporting my theory that canonical readings of the myth are often immobilized in a sex/gender binary frame.

I focus in particular on the character of Antigone because many scholars have engaged with this figure⁹⁹ and have appropriated her claim in the Western feminist and non-feminist imaginary.

⁹⁷ “Women may have common situations and experiences, but they are not, in any way, the same” (Braidotti, 2011, p.141).

⁹⁸ In outlining the ‘binary debate’, I will consider these philosophers, because in my opinion they have similar but also different approaches in analysing the myth of Antigone. As far as it concerns Irigaray, Rossanda and Cavarero, they appropriate Antigone’s myth by influencing each other but with different outcomes; such similarities within differences support my theory about the variety of myths’ interpretations that repeat the binary.

⁹⁹ The myth of Antigone has reached the contemporary world over the centuries, through Sophocles’ play, which is the third of three Theban plays. The tragedy was written around 442 BC (Condello, 2009). Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta. The tragedy occurs when she refuses to obey to a decree ratified by her uncle and king of Thebes, Kreon. During a war between her brother Polyneikes and Eteocles, in which both are killed, Kreon declares Polyneikes a traitor and refuses him funeral rites. Refusing to obey Kreon’s commands, Antigone declares that she is going to bury the brother she loves, appealing to the laws of the gods as superior to civil laws. Therefore, she buries her brother in secret, fully aware that this crime will lead to her death. Refusing to deny her act, she is finally sentenced to a living burial.

The common ground among both feminist and non-feminist readings is the tendency to define Antigone's gender through her actions. These readings either posit Antigone as a female subject who challenges gender domains, entering the public sphere, which normally belongs to men such as King Kreon; or they emphasize the different gender roles, stressing in particular the impossibility for a woman to access the public sphere: in both cases, they reproduce the female/male binary in hierarchical and privileged terms.

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is one of the most famous readers of Antigone's myth. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), the philosopher focuses on the clash between Kreon – who represents the *polis*, the universal, and human law – and Antigone, who stands for family, the particular, and divine law. This aligns with the general conception of women upholding divine law as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, while citizens – men – uphold human law (Hutchings, 2003). Accordingly, Hegel notices that Antigone's action of burying her brother is the fulfilment of her familial ethical duty, which is a woman's unique responsibility required by men, for the *polis*' sake (McBean, 2016). “Hegel's diagnosis of womankind, as we have seen, occurs in a wider framework, which endorses the relegation of women to the private domain” (Lloyd, 2004, p.107). Thus, in Hegel's reading, Antigone represents women who are essential to the *polis*, but kept out of it: “Hegel cannot recognize Antigone as acting politically because, as a woman, she acts from the family sphere” (McBean, 2016, p.30). In a different but similar vein, Jacques Lacan in the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis Book VII* (1986) claims that Antigone's action, as a woman, is outside the political sphere. “Lacan does not read Antigone as being in a dialectical relationship with Kreon, as Hegel does, but he too relegates her to a space beyond the political” (Leonard, 2006, p.124). From this perspective, neither Lacan nor Hegel recognizes her as a citizen because she is the woman who challenges the dominant male-defined model of citizenship.

Conversely, the sexual difference philosopher Luce Irigaray¹⁰⁰ in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1989), departing from Hegel's and Lacan's interpretations, voices a counter-argument that defends Antigone's political role as exemplary for women:

Her example is always worth reflecting upon as a historical figure and as an identity and identification for many girls and women living today. For this reflection, we must abstract Antigone from the seductive, reductive discourses and listen to what she has to say about government of the polis, its order and its law (Irigaray, 1989, 70).

Indeed, Irigaray points to the phallogocentric bias of both Hegel and Lacan's interpretations and she notices that “Antigone's exclusion from the political is not self-willed exile, but is rather the result of the prejudice of her readers from Hegel to Lacan and beyond” (Leonard, 2006, p.122). Also in *Thinking the Difference* (1994), the philosopher argues for the political nature of Antigone's

¹⁰⁰ Luce Irigaray, in her analysis of Antigone, supports sexual difference as “the question that we early twenty-first-century Westerns are historically bound to struggle with” (Braidotti, 2011, p.137).

character: she ascribes the fact that Hegel and Lacan cannot read the burial of Antigone's brother as the action of a citizen to their inability to consider the potential of feminist citizenship, which is a position beyond the dominant model of citizenship and, thus, unrepresentable within the phallogocentric scheme of representation. In sum, in her analysis, she focuses on the positive female political possibility. On the subject, Braidotti argues that Irigaray gives positivity to the female term of the dualistic debate (2011, p.152):

Luce Irigaray stresses the need to recognize, as a factual and historical reality, that there is no symmetry between the sexes and that this asymmetry has been organized hierarchically by the phallogocentric regime. The feminist project attempts to redefine it in terms of positivity.

In addition, Irigaray stresses the female genealogy that Antigone upholds by satisfying her mother's expectations (1974, 1989): the heroine buries Polyneikes' body and, in so doing, she fulfils her mother's desire. Indeed, Irigaray argues that societies are strongly influenced by a deep violence that consists of the breaking down of the mother-daughter relationship caused by patriarchy. Antigone's society teaches that "il legame tra madre e figlia, figlia e madre deve spezzarsi perché la figlia divenga donna. La genealogia femminile deve essere soppressa a vantaggio dell'idealizzazione del padre e del marito come patriarchi" (Irigaray, 1985, p.87)¹⁰¹. Thus, the philosopher calls for the necessity to re-found, among women, an ethical order characterised by two dimensions: a horizontal one that corresponds with sisterhood, and a vertical one that represents the mother-daughter bond. Irigaray explains that the female genealogy might help overcome the patriarchal indifference imposed on female relationships:

[La genealogia femminile] da una parte serve a simbolizzare quello che passa tra madre e figlia, facendoci superare il legame patriarcale dell'indifferenziazione e rivalità tra donne. Dall'altra, esso ci apre la dimensione di un di più di segno femminile, e ci dà l'idea di un divenire donna nella fedeltà al nostro sesso (Irigaray, 1985, pp.82-84)¹⁰².

To sum up, "one finds Antigone defended and championed, for instance, by Luce Irigaray as a principle of feminine defiance of statism" (Butler, 2000, p.1). Indeed, Irigaray's focus is on Antigone as a female political symbol – and it also invokes a female genealogy capable of overturning the patriarchal order that has been established by patriarchal power. Hence, even though Irigaray reflects upon the political role of Antigone, she remains within the boundaries of a female-male binary-based analysis, emphasising Antigone's political value as a woman.

In the same way, but with different outcomes, the philosopher Rossana Rossanda in "Antigone Ricorrente" (1988) insists on the female character of the heroine, trying to answer the

¹⁰¹ "In order to become a woman, the daughter has to break down the mother-daughter bound. The female genealogy has to be suppressed in advantage of the father and the husband inasmuch as patriarchs"(My translation).

¹⁰² "On one hand, the female genealogy symbolizes the mother-daughter bound, allowing to overcome the patriarchal bound of non-differentiation and women's rivalry. On the other hand, it opens towards something else that belongs to women, and it enacts the 'becoming woman' in relation with our sex" (My translation).

question: “ma come mai è donna il simbolo della rivolta politica?”¹⁰³ (1988, p.48). Rossanda emphasizes that the female character of Antigone breaks the rigid difference – both social and political – that assigns different roles to female and male subjects respectively, imposing political duties on men and, instead, “a una donna un compito subalterno, piuttosto l’ubbidienza che la trasgressione, piuttosto la sfera del sentimento che quella della ragione”¹⁰⁴ (1988, p.48). Antigone, in Rossanda’s analysis as in Irigaray’s interpretation, appears as a female character that provokes the political system of the *polis* that normally belongs to men. In sum, the philosopher moves from the assumption of Antigone’s femininity, without questioning it, and then interrogates her unusual role as a female who becomes a political agent.

Another poignant contribution to such a (gender) binary cluster of interpretations around the figure of Antigone is given by Adriana Cavarero in *Corpi in figure. Filosofia e politica della corporeità* (1995). The philosopher observes Antigone’s language and actions, by evoking the history of the female material body that is driven away from the *polis*, as opposed to the male body, reinforced by the *logos* and belonging to the *polis* (Cavarero, 1995). In such a scenario, Cavarero posits Kreon, who personifies “il consustanzarsi dell’identità maschile con l’identità politica contro l’impoliticità dell’altro sesso”¹⁰⁵ (Cavarero, 1995, p.50). Interestingly - and Irigaray mentions this too – the philosopher stresses her female identity as almost “già naturalmente iscritta in quell’orizzonte consanguineo di materna fonte che innerva il suo agire”¹⁰⁶ (Cavarero, 1995, p.21). Cavarero asserts that, differently from her sister Ismene, Antigone does not remind the obligations she has as a woman. This is not because she ignores her femaleness, but rather because in her being born by her mother lies the necessity to act for her brother: “il suo esser donna sta bene prima e al di là di una sessuazione femminile letta dal codice societario come destino di un ruolo subalterno”¹⁰⁷ (1995, p.51). In other words, in Cavarero’s reading, the fact that Antigone is born as a woman is strongly tied to the symbolic nature of the female body of the mother. Hence, she is certain of her femininity and she does not look for other confirmations; conversely, Kreon looks to strongly state his masculinity (1995). Cavarero also notices that it is in the direct confrontation with Antigone that Kreon, reminding the sexual difference, is afraid of an inversion of roles. Therefore, Cavarero interprets the figure of Antigone as strongly determined by a femininity that does not need to be made explicit; rather, it is a free femininity, able to express itself even beyond the *polis*’ laws.

¹⁰³ “Why is a woman the symbol of political revolt?” (My translation).

¹⁰⁴ The difference that imposes “a subaltern role on women: obedience rather than transgression; the sentimental sphere rather than the rational one” (My translation).

¹⁰⁵ Kreon personifies “the intersection of the male identity with the political identity against the non-political one represented by the other sex” (My translation).

¹⁰⁶ Antigone’s female identity “is already naturally inscribed in the maternal blood that influences her action” (My translation).

¹⁰⁷ “Her femininity impacts more than her sex, which brings her the subaltern destiny imposed by the social code” (My translation).

To conclude, “[Antigone’s] language against the state has been adopted, her standpoint in the name of her family and the private sphere has been championed, and her defiance praised by feminists” and non-feminists (McBean, 2016, p.22). However, the readings I have presented so far, from Hegel and Lacan to Irigaray, Rossanda and Cavarero are valid examples of the ways Antigone’s myth contributes to repeating the gender binary economy. In my opinion, such a repetition is problematic; thus, under the influence of Butler, I intend to move beyond the sexual difference analysis. In particular, I agree with Butler’s insight that the citation of the binary logic is “a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity” (Butler, 2004, p.11), and, thus, a precondition for the perpetuation of dualistic thoughts and hierarchical relations. Thereby, inspired by Butler’s *Undoing gender* (2004), I think that the very attribution of either femininity or masculinity to Antigone’s identity represents a normalizing analysis that reproduces false conceptions of gender and identification: institutional readings repeat settled landscapes, especially concerning the allegedly compulsory gender dualism. Contrary to such a binary economy, which forecloses the gender fixity, and moving beyond sexual difference analysis, I personally believe in the changeability of gender as an unstable category of identification that, then, cannot be closed in a rigid dualism. As Butler (2004, p.10) argues:

Terms such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose. That the terms recur is interesting enough, but the recurrence does not index a sameness, but rather the way in which the social articulation of term depends upon its repetition, which constitutes one dimension of the performative structure of gender. Terms of gender designation are thus never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade.

According to such a conception of gender as a mutable construction, the attempt to encompass identities within fixed gender categories is a political strategy to assure order and to prevent forms of deviance. Accordingly, Antigone has been repressed into heterosexual conformity and in a gender fixed identification by interpretations that risk reinforcing normalizing attitudes. As a consequence, my intervention is a strike against the complacency of normative readings and a call for a ‘new’ way of approaching the myth of Antigone, in order to make it a means for embracing and learning identitarian multiplicity. Such gesture should not be taken only as a defense of minority identities; rather, as a way to ‘think differently of difference’ (Braidotti, 2011) and, above all, a way to escape the logic of the binary which still dominates any discussions on gender and identity. At the root of my reading is a strong consciousness of gender fluidity and, thus, of the changeability of identity, which represents the awareness that can catalyze socio-political change.

4.2 Anne Carson's *Antigonick*

On the other hand, another group of our authors might be said to transcend the Western tradition by looking to the Antigones born of that tradition's beyond or other (Chanter and Kirkland, 2014, p.3).

In this section, I present Anne Carson's¹⁰⁸ *Antigonick*¹⁰⁹, clarifying the reasons why I intend to engage with this particular play. On one hand, this text is a free reworking of Sophocles' play, and also a rich container of modern interpretations of Antigone's myth; on the other hand, it is the author's own translation of the original play, which represents a more or less faithful translation of Sophocles' play. The artist and researcher Ben Hjorth, in his essay 'We're Standing in/the Nick of Time. The temporality of translation in Anne Carson's *Antigonick*' (2014) defines *Antigonick* as an intriguing text-performance: it is a "staged reading of Anne Carson's translation of Sophocles' Ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone* (c.441 BC) enigmatically retitled *Antigonick* (Carson 2012a)" (Hjorth, 2014, p.135).

In re-analysing the myth of Antigone, I focus on *Antigonick* because this text clearly contains those issues – that I outlined in the previous chapter – that make classical myth an important pedagogical medium. Indeed, *Antigonick* gives Antigone a new voice and, thanks to its hybrid structure¹¹⁰, it overcomes temporal limits and expressly distances itself from the normative readings of the myth. Accordingly, the first thing I felt in the text was the particular exigency to give Antigone a new claim; as Butler argues in her essay "Can't stop screaming" (2012, unpaginated): "every line of *Antigonick* is printed in boldface handwriting, emphatic, as if something urgent and excessive has to be loudly said". In my opinion, the text intends to give the reader the feeling of something urgent and new that Antigone wants to tell and, thus, it compels the reader to listen to new claims. Such is the author's commitment and, on this subject, Carson openly states that her task is – "to forbid that you [Antigone] should ever lose your screams" (Carson, 2015, p.6). I too wish to embrace Carson's aim – to give Antigone a voice – as it was also my own aim in reading the figure of Antigone from a feministqueer gaze.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Carson (1950) is a Canadian poet, a translator and a professor of Classics. She taught at McGill University, the University of Michigan and Princeton University. She has a background in Classics, comparative literature, anthropology, history and art, and has a particular sensibility for topics related to gender within literature. As I will outline in *Antigonick*, in her writing she tends to merge these different fields.

¹⁰⁹ *Antigonick* is a text but it is also "an intriguing performance [that] took place at New York University (NYU) on 22 February 2013, and at a crossroads of performance and philosophy: a staged reading of Anne Carson's translation [...] In this public event, Carson played the Chorus while philosopher Judith Butler played the role of Kreon" (Hjorth, 2014, p.135). In the same year, on the 26th of June, Butler played the role of Kreon, the king of Thebes in a performance of *Antigonick* that took place at the Amphithéâtre Richelieu, Université Paris-Sorbonne.

¹¹⁰ The format is hybrid for the following reasons: firstly, there is a preliminary introduction – namely a dialogue between the author and Antigone in which Carson talks about the legacy of Antigone and her interpreters. In addition, as far as the style of the play is concerned, there are no verses, no punctuation marks and the narration is very fluid and concise. Carson also adds a new character, Nick, to remind us of the timelessness of myth.

Furthermore, much of *Antigonick*'s transformative potential lies in the fact that it is not only a translation of the Greek play, but rather an appropriation of the myth. In this regard, I agree with Butler that *Antigonick* is not a simple translation, because from the very beginning contemporary elements intervene: "stage directions are inserted within brackets, characters cite contemporary critics, and the scenes are referred to as 'episodes' (Butler, 2012). For these reasons, and also because the characters on stage come from a mythic, historical past, but speak the audience's language, saying things about their present (Hjorth, 2014), Butler defines *Antigonick* as "more transference than translation" (Butler, 2012) of the original play. On top of this, Carson skips lines, adds some from contemporary discourses, and consequently she disperses the textual effects of this play for our times:

Carson does not 'rewrite' Antigone. Her text becomes the verbal and visual scanning of a prolonged scream or cry. Emphatic, elliptical, *Antigonick* is more transference than translation, a relay of tragedy into a contemporary vernacular that mixes with archaic phrasing, sometimes lacking commas and periods, a halting and then a rushing of words structured by the syntax of grief and rage, spanning centuries. The lines often stand alone, as if broken off from the original text, stricken monuments (Butler, 2012).

I have chosen this 'translation-transference' as my case study, because it thematizes values and concepts that travel through time and space and, in so doing, it challenges the fixity of time and space¹¹¹. This is a very important point for my analysis: as I previously argued regarding the (a)temporality of myth, *Antigonick* allows me to deal with the myth of Antigone from a contemporary perspective because the author herself operates in this way and thus the myth offers means of interpreting cotemporary times. Indeed, *Antigonick* speaks to some of Antigone's modern interpreters; in particular, it brings forth and criticizes a number of (hetero) normative and normalizing interpretations of the *Antigone* – most notable among these Hegel's, whose negative ethical judgment of Antigone, as occupying an intransigent, singular pathos, lacking in self-consciousness, is strongly refuted from the beginning. In other words, *Antigonick* brings forth the myth with its contemporary outcomes and, accordingly, the author recognizes that in order for the myth to talk about us, it has to be observed by a new gaze.

In so doing, Carson introduces the problem of the myths' reception and this is, indeed, another important and transformative function of *Antigonick* – that made me eager to investigate the heroine through this text in particular. This play incorporates voices that speak of the reception of *Antigone* in modern times:

¹¹¹ In this respect, it is interesting to remark that during the performance at the Louisiana Literature festival – held on the 25th of August, 2012 – a rope held by the new character, Nick, is moved around the stage to circumscribe the performers and the space itself. In my opinion, the rope's movements symbolize the unfixity of space and the fluidity of Antigone's myth, capable of speaking even to the world today: in other words, the fluid motion of the rope conveys the (a)temporality and (a)spatiality of the myth itself.

For instance, the sisters Antigone and Ismene self-consciously incorporate bits of Hegel, Beckett, and Freud into their famous standoff, knitting the reception of Antigone into the play itself, letting us know that our only access to this play is through this present time, and yet showing that this time is still bound to that classical one (Butler, 2012).

Indeed, inputs from Hegel and Beckett's interpretations of Sophocles' play are inserted into the text by Antigone herself, as in the following:

Antigone: we begin in the dark and birth is the death of us
Ismene: who said that
Antigone: Hegel
Ismene: sounds more like Beckett
Antigone: he was phrasing Hegel
Ismene: I don't think so (Carson, 2015, p.9).

Antigone: some think the world is made of bodies some think
forces
I think a man knows nothing but his foot when he
burns it in the hot fire
Ismene: quoting Hegel again
Antigone: Hegel says I am wrong
Ismene: but right to be wrong
(Carson, 2015, p.21).

Thus, in *Antigonick*, "the long and contested history of Antigone interpretation takes centre stage" (Hjort, 2014, p.135) and consequently, Carson challenges¹¹² traditional and normative frames that canonical interpretations produce:

Carson's apparently 'unfaithful' translation in fact constitutes and performs a challenge to conservative, chronological, teleological temporal frames that constantly threaten to bury the irruptive potential of this figure, within the deathly chamber of distant, fixed, 'original' past (Hjorth, 2014, p.136).

Challenging conservative and chronological patterns, Carson mentions the traditional and normative understanding of the myth of Antigone, and thus, she contests and questions it. In this respect, I think that the above passage, which stresses the darkness that has surrounded the figure of Antigone, might refer to the darkness of normative interpretations. Consequently, the expression "I don't think so" seems to impose a denial of such a tradition that has segregated Antigone in a dark shadow, in order to see something new. I find evidence of this in Carson's preface, "the task of the translator of antigone", in which the author enacts an intimate dialogue with Antigone and, by addressing her as "dear Antigone", she declares:

it's not that we want to understand everything
or even to understand anything
we want to understand something else (Carson, 2015, p.3).

In my view, such a statement makes explicit the necessity to observe and thus to understand something different from what the 'normal interpretations'¹¹³ have imposed on

¹¹² In the part related to 'the task of the translator of antigone', before the play itself, Carson (2015) dialogues with Antigone and she returns to the reception of the myth, briefly recalling Brecht, Hegel, Butler, George Eliot, Zizek, John Ashbery and Ingeborg Bachmann.

Antigone. Indeed, Carson mentions ‘normality’ as something that does not belong to the myth of Antigone:

if you go places that don’t have an obvious way in, like normality
or an obvious way out, like the classic double bind
well that’s your problem (Carson, 2015, p.4).

In such an argument – that I read as an open confession to Antigone – the author declares that normality and the double – thus, dualistic and binary – bind, typical of normative interpretations, is not her focus. Accordingly, I think that Carson’s Antigone brings us beyond what is perceived as normality, by firstly putting under scrutiny the notion of normality itself:

you want us to listen to the sound of what happens
when everything normal/musical/careful/conventional or pious
is taken away (Carson, 2015, p.6).

Therefore, attempting to overcome the world of normality, Carson tends to appropriate the myth, beyond temporal binds. Indeed, she manages to achieve what the classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff describes: “to make the ancients speak we must feed them with our own blood” (qtd. in Lloyd-Jones 1983, p.200). Thereby, Carson makes visible the myths’ potential to travel over time and space and to be read and interpreted through a new, contemporary language. According to Butler (2012), Carson transmutes the classic Greek terms into contemporary and popular language. The title – *Antigo nick*¹¹⁴ – is already a play on the concept of time, as it alludes to ‘the nick of time’, which is repeatedly mentioned in the text. For instance, the following lines sport a clear insistence on the essence of time:

here’s Kreon,
nick of time (Carson, 2015, p.17).

another
an hour
an hour and a half
a year
a split second
a decade
thus instant
a second
a split second
a now
a nick
a nick (Carson, 2015, p.37).

here we are we’re all fine
we’re standing in
the nick of time (Carson, 2015, p.37).

you’re late (Carson, 2015, p.42).

¹¹³ By ‘normal’ I intend normalizing and, thus, institutional and traditional.

¹¹⁴ On the book’s cover, the title is written with a space dividing Antigo from Nick; in my opinion it serves to make the reference to time more explicit.

These passages prove that the notion of time is central in Carson's text and that she plays with it - she plays with the time of Antigone's myth that is simultaneously past and present. Thus, as Butler notices, the "nick of classical Greek time becomes lodged in our own time" (Butler, 2012). In addition, at the end of the text, everyone dies but 'nick', who survives: "*Antigonick* is a coinage that adds the problem of time to the character of Antigone" (Butler, 2012). Accordingly, there is always a nick of time for Antigone, which is not something that stays regular and predictable: the time that *Antigonick* addresses "stops and starts, alters its pace and spatial form, breaks open white space unexpectedly, and registers a loss it can neither forestall nor redeem" (Butler, 2012). In this way, *Antigonick* suggests that something urgent and awful has taken place and is still taking place; thus, what has happened in a sense keeps happening:

These repetitions mark the continuing life of unconscious rage, explicit sorrow, unpredictable and winning humor, and new aesthetic forms that traverse the temporal distance between then and now (Butler, 2012).

Carson thus gives the myth a contemporary soul and, in so doing, she makes it go on living: "it is our blood that makes them [texts and myths] speak to us" (Nietzsche qtd. in Williams, 1993, p.174). Such (a)temporality¹¹⁵ proves what I argued in the previous chapter regarding myth's potential to overcome time limits; and this particular feature allows me to interrogate *Antigonick* in order to learn from the present. In other words, Carson's translation is concerned with bridging temporal gaps and it symbolizes the (a)temporality of the myth itself: "in Carson's translation Antigone seems to occupy a locutionary and performative position that traverses and problematizes chronological temporality itself" (Hjorth, 2014, p.135). Hence, *Antigonick* perpetuates the survival of Antigone's myth in and through time and it does so by appropriating the myth itself. In such a way, *Antigonick* revolves around the topic of truth and faithfulness to the original, by showing another side of the story regarding the reception of myths, in which they are transformed in line with present needs. Such an appropriation of the myth through tragedy concretizes the repetition of Antigone's fate as still instructive in the present:

The text suggests that tragedy is by no means a thing of the past, but that what happened then keeps happening, and that these repetitions mark the continuing life of unconscious rage, explicit sorrow, unpredictable and winning humor, and new aesthetic forms that traverse the temporal distance between then and now (Butler, 2012).

In sum, "the temporally paradoxical performativity of Antigone" (Hjort, 2014, p.137) facilitates the author in revisiting the myth through a new voice that moves beyond the traditional conception of normality, beyond normative interpretations and beyond temporal binds. Focussing on the elements that give *Antigonick* its transformative power, I engage with it through my feministqueer gaze. My feministqueer reading of *Antigonick*, in accordance with

¹¹⁵ I use the word (a)temporality because both the myth of Antigone and the translation by Carson are at once inserted within a precise temporal frame and extended beyond temporal limits.

Carson's purpose of writing a transformative translation, aims at reaching new understandings of Antigone's myth, beyond normalcy and beyond spatiotemporal binds.

4.3 Feministqueer reading of Anne Carson's *Antigonick*

In what follows, I will engage with Carson's *Antigonick* (2015) through my feministqueer reading method, so as to return to "Antigone as a figure who represents the possibility of something different, of an alternative perspective" (McBean, 2016, p.35). As McBean argues in *Queer Temporalities* (2016, p.33), this retrospective act makes sense because "Antigone is particularly ripe for these continuous returns because she herself refuses to settle down" in fixed spaces and time. Thus, my reading aims at looking at Antigone in a way that is different from the institutional and traditional one: more specifically, I will situate the dialogue with Antigone in our current time and I will talk to the heroine so as to move the myth beyond normative readings and enhance a personal awareness against the concept of normalcy. In such way, a mutual exchange with the heroine comes about, because "again and again, Antigone seems capable of illuminating and reframing the ethical and political issues that are most vital and pressing for a given culture at a given historical moment" (Chanter, Kirkland, 2014, p.3).

Therefore, in order to give Antigone a new voice, I will construct my feministqueer reading out of pieces of silence from the text, in line with Carson's (2015, p.5) description of her writing process: "I built it up gradually out of many small pieces of silence". Indeed, the feministqueer reading I will thematize in this section is composed of many gaps and silences that have made me question the monolithic character and unique voice of the heroine. In particular, as I will point out below, at a first reading I noticed a few moments in the myth in which the heroine is silent; passages in which she does not even reply to the provocations of many characters wishing to erect gender dichotomies. As a consequence, Antigone's silences have encouraged me to use my own voice by pushing my analysis beyond gender binaries. My reading focuses on the itinerant existence of Antigone, which operates as a destabilizing force and as a transgressing symbol that deconstructs the patterns of privilege and normalization.

As I have already clarified in the second chapter, throughout this feministqueer reading, my aim is to undo the notion of gender as a fixed category and, consequently, to unsettle the gender binary and the heteronormative logic; generally speaking, my purpose is to disrupt the notion of 'normalcy' related to identitarian identifications. Therefore, my feministqueer reading of *Antigonick* is a practice that attempts to undo and then reform and fluidify gender significations within the myth itself: such a practice marks the fluidity of gender and reveals multiple possibilities of

identification. As Olivia Guaraldo (2006) argues in the preface to the Italian version of Butler's *Undoing Gender*¹¹⁶:

Detto altrimenti, il gender non è una fredda categoria di normalizzazione, ma un ambito di azione individuale e collettiva che può e deve costantemente essere occupato e contestato da soggetti e pratiche a un tempo decostruttive e ri-costruttive (Guaraldo, 2006, p.15)¹¹⁷.

Accordingly, the feministqueer reading process exemplified below, while reconsidering Antigone's identity, stresses gender as a non-stable category, and thus reflects on Antigone's queer identity. Thereby, my reading reassesses Antigone's identity, in order to focus on the possibility of remaking gender; as Butler argues in *Undoing gender* (2004, p.10):

To understand gender as a historical category, however, is to accept that gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open to a continual remaking, and that "anatomy" and "sex" are not without cultural framing.

Hence, I will observe gender relations in the myth of Antigone, by appropriating the myth, so as to raise awareness of the essence of queer identity, beyond gender binary constrictions. In other words, I aim at raising awareness of the changeable potential of gender identifications, by reworking through the gender binary in reading *Antigonick*. In so doing, I try to bring the myth of Antigone to life in present times, while observing relationships and (gender) identifications for what they are: performances of transformative female/male/both categories. In practice, I will engage with Carson's *Antigonick* – particularly with Antigone's identity – through Judith Butler's thought¹¹⁸, in order to give Antigone new life through her resistance to the assimilation of normative readings and, furthermore, to reflect upon and celebrate the heroine's queerness.

In this section I put into practice the feministqueer reading process outlined in the second chapter: first of all, I posit myself as a feministqueer reader; secondly, I observe and recognize the resistances to patterns of normalization within the text, with a particular attention to those passages that seek to repeat a closed female/male binary. Thirdly, once the resistances have been identified, I analyse and deconstruct them one at a time; and finally, I propose a wider, queer resignification of Antigone's identity, beyond binary models. In other words, in this section I put into practice the reading method I have previously outlined: such a practice is an embodied and emotional dialogue with *Antigonick*, which I feel is necessary after having been forced within 'difference-inspired' (Braidotti, 2011, p.140) readings by institutional education. The method I have created derives from

¹¹⁶ Olivia Guaraldo, "La disfatta del gender e la questione dell'umano" (2006) in Judith Butler, *Fare e Disfare il Genere* (2014).

¹¹⁷"In other words, gender is not a closed category of normalization, rather it is a field of individual and collective practice, which must be repeatedly occupied and contested by subjects and practices that are at once deconstructive and reconstructive" (My translation).

¹¹⁸I will draw in particular on Judith Butler's *Bodies that matter* (1994), *Antigone's claim. Kinship between life and death* (2000), *Undoing gender* (2004), *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the subversion of Identity* (2007) and *Can't stop screaming* (review of *Antigonick*, 2012). Even though many of Butler's reflections on Antigone concern the notion of kinship and its outcomes, my analysis is based on the implication of gender in the myth of Antigone – as Butler considers it.

my own frustration before the dichotomised interpretations of Antigone as either entrapped in a symbolic ‘femininity’ or a brave ‘masculinity’: I have always felt nervous, and intimately resistant in the face of certain passages that clash with my intent to move beyond the Western, traditional binary, based on hierarchies and compulsory roles distinguishing men and women. In particular, I have always felt a strong resistance to the way the aforementioned passages have been analysed so far by traditional interpretations, and I struggled to understand the reasons behind such strong tensions. The answer came at some point from the resistances themselves: the silences in the text whispered to me that in those passage something different, something new was going to burst in. Following these whispers, I constructed a feministqueer reading method, and now that I put it into practice, my commitment lies in giving voice to those silences, in order to enhance fluid representations.

Thus, the following close reading testifies my intimate engagement with *Antigonick*, aiming at deconstructing the resistances in order to raise a voice beyond restrictions, through an analysis of Carson’s translation. I will analyze three moments in particular in which I experienced a bodily resistance to the text, because I recognized either words or silences that reinforce and secure the gender binary and a heterosexual frame. During my embodied dialogue with the myth, I firstly pause my reading and I interrogate those passages in which some characters impose the female/male binary, by clearly opposing different gender roles; secondly, I explore Antigone’s appropriation of the patriarchal-political *logos*; and finally, I focus on the heroine’s incestuous desire and the consequent notion of familial normalcy. Such resistances mirror three socio-political ‘constructions’ that are commonly normalized by the dominant system: gender identification, language and family. In this respect, I locate my analysis – in order to move it beyond dualism – within the debate that has played a dominant role in Western Philosophy and which Genevieve Lloyd explores in *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in the Western Philosophy* (2004). Male/female, public/ private, body/mind (*logos*) are indeed the foundational binaries which constitute Western societies. Such binaries are based on the historical understanding of the Western tradition that: “female gender is material, corporeal, sense perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought” (Lloyd, 2004, p.27). Therefore, my resistances mirror and question those normative understandings of gender, *logos* and family, seeking to move beyond the general and historically-grounded thought of Western Philosophy that considers the female and male sphere as neatly separated and determined by the ‘exclusion’ (Lloyd, 2004) of the feminine within hierarchical power relations. In the next sections, I will individually analyze each resistance in order to deconstruct the Western traditional dualisms and interrupt the repetition of gender binary patterns.

As far as my location is concerned, I have already stated my position as a feministqueer researcher; I occupy the same position in reading *Antigonick*. Indeed, such a position allows me to observe Antigone's identity from a perspective that aims at freeing her from the female/male binary, and also at making notions such as identitarian multiplicity and the unfixity of gender commonly thinkable. I assume such a position because I strongly believe that feministqueer knowledge can be transmitted via classical myths. In addition, my feministqueer position can shed light on the queerness of those identities, identifications and relations that are present in classical myth – but have been kept obscured – and that are useful in raising awareness of current identitarian multiplicity.

First resistance: Gender identification

Ismene: we two are alone
And we are girls
Girls cannot force their way against men
Antigone: yes I will
(Carson, 2015, p.10).

Kreon: here's Kreon's nouns
Men
Reason [...]
(Carson, 2015, p.14).

Kreon: you think you are iron but I can bend you
I'm the man here
Antigone: yes you are
(Carson, 2015, p. 19).

Kreon: I will not be worsted by a woman
(Carson, 2015, p.20).

Ismene: well we all think you're a grand girl
Antigone: is this an argument
(Carson, 2015, p.21).

Kreon: this fellow it seems is the woman's toy
Haimon: if you are the woman
It's you I care for
(Carson, 2015, p. 26).

Kreon: let him go
Big Man
(Carson, 2015, p.27).

While reading these passages, Antigone's words, and her silences become a sort of impasse. Indeed, her silences are powerful, and in them I notice a gap between what Antigone represents and the dichotomies that the Western tradition has superposed on her voice. I feel a tension that blocks my reading; I ask myself: why do normative interpretations insist upon her female gender, when she herself overcomes such a definition? In these passages, I feel a sort of vagueness in the expression

of Antigone's gender identity that resounds within me as an attempt at fluidity. For this reason, here I face my first natural resistance to both the text and its traditional interpretations: in all of these sentences, there is a tendency to define identity within dualistic gender categories. In particular, in these lines I feel a mental and bodily refusal of such a binary logic that pushes me to strongly question these passages. Indeed, I notice in them a twofold tendency: firstly, the attempt of both king Kreon and Ismene, Antigone's sister, to define their own identities within closed borders; secondly, Antigone's vagueness and her desire to not define her gender. In fact, on one hand Kreon's need to name and categorize gender roles and identities emerges with extreme clarity: he is the man/male and, thus, the ruler; conversely, Antigone is the woman/female and, thus, the subjected. On the other hand, it seems that Antigone has no interest in defining and defending her own gender identity; rather, she avoids answering Ismene's warning. In addition, Haimon, Antigone's betrothed, seems to confuse the gender identities at play, playing with the idea that Kreon is, in fact, the woman.

Hence, Carson's version of the play sports a wanted ambiguity regarding gender identifications, emphasized on one hand by Antigone and Haimon's statements and silences; on the other, by Ismene and Kreon's tendency to define and to circumscribe gender roles. In this respect, I find Kreon's sentences an interesting starting point to reflect on expressions that reinforce the binary. Indeed, the phrase "you think you are iron but I can bend you, I'm the man here" seems to insist on the impossibility of thinking beyond two genders and it also reinforces the fixity of gender identities, related to unchangeable gender roles and attributes, as if to say: if I am a man you can be only a woman; if I have masculine power, you can only be submissive to me. My point here is that Antigone opposes such statements and consequently escapes such a forced binary logic: in the following analysis I outline her tendency to not define her own identity within a closed binary.

In particular, in this section, I focus on Antigone's inclination to not define her gender identity within a female/male restriction, and to keep away from such an oppositional rhetoric. Indeed, Antigone does not categorize nor define herself, in line with Butler's principle that "the naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm" (1993, p.8). With respect to binary identifications, Antigone's figure manages thereby to answer Butler's question (2007, p.44): "What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine?" (Butler, 2007, p.189). Indeed, Antigone's performance never tries to give a precise definition of her own gender and, in so doing, she subverts the regulatory practices that prescribe the necessity to be defined as either/or. Conversely, Kreon, the chorus and the messenger attempt to define a unity of gender as the effect of a regulatory political practice that seeks to maintain order through the definition of the oppositional female/male gender

categories: “Interestingly enough, both Antigone’s act of burial and her act of defiance become the occasions on which she is called “manly” by the chorus, Kreon, and the messenger” (Butler, 2000, p.8). In other words, Kreon in particular, as the symbol of the political scene, seeks to align Antigone’s gender identity with her sex, through a compulsory binary dichotomy; conversely, Antigone troubles the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs. Therefore, according to Gabriella Mariotti (2015, p.104) in her essay “Antigone o delle leggi infrante”, Antigone challenges “la fatalità non tanto del genere quanto soprattutto quella del suo declinarsi normativo che sotto le mentite spoglie di natura, articola compiti e ruoli del tutto politici e culturali”¹¹⁹. In other words, Antigone challenges the notion of gender “as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems” (Butler, 2007, p.190) and consequently, due to such a non-categorizing tendency that is a performance of gender fluidity, she faces punitive consequences. In such a way, she does not employ the oppositional rhetoric – used by both Ismene and Creon, who seek to define oppositional gender identities – rather she embraces “la dialettica dei distinti [che] rimanda al superamento dell’oppositività adolescenziale che cerca disperatamente la diversità [e dunque] il superamento della dicotomia oppositiva di genere” (Mariotti, 2015, p.107)¹²⁰.

Thus, if the relationship between Antigone and Kreon is apparently the symbol of the female/male binary opposition and thus the compulsory and coherent gender dichotomy, in fact they both displace the binary. Indeed, although Kreon is inclined to define himself as a male subject opposed to Antigone, the female one, actually, in the whole play there is a confusion of gender positions. In fact, after the first scenes, an ambiguity becomes evident in an overlapping of terms, used both on the side of Antigone and on the side of Kreon. Accordingly, Butler (2000, p.10) explains that “in speaking to him, she [Antigone] becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender throughout the play”. In sum, if at the beginning Antigone does not define her gender identity while Kreon is determined to do so, at the end, there is a general upheaval and Kreon himself seems lost and confused about his own gender, in such a way that the expression “Big Man” (Carson, 2012, p.27) referred to himself, sounds merely sarcastic.

Second resistance: political *logos*’ appropriation

Kreon [to Antigone]: and you with your head down you’re the one
 Antigone: bingo
 Kreon [to Guard]: go
 (Carson, 2015, p.18).

¹¹⁹Antigone challenges “the fatality not only of gender, but first and foremost of its being regarded as a norm which, even though it is considered as natural, is rather political and cultural in its functions” (My translation).

¹²⁰She embraces “the rhetoric of distinction/separation, which recalls the overcoming of the adolescent tendency to oppose, looking for differences and attempting to go beyond the gender binary” (My Translation).

Carson's translation of this passage is very concise and loose, with just two words: bingo and go. As a consequence, Antigone appears as a punctual and sarcastic figure who, rather than asserting her deed with an articulated speech, just scream 'bingo'. My resistance to these lines emerged for the first time while reading Sophocles' play in its literal translation from the Greek original: 'I say that I did it and I do not deny it (43)'¹²¹. In this passage, there is no silence; rather, Antigone speaks and, because she does it with such irreverence, it compels me forcefully to stop reading. I feel the need to question this very determined and sarcastic voice, to know more about the sudden appearance of such a claim. To contextualize this passage briefly, Antigone has just buried her brother Polyneikes, despite Kreon's prohibition. In fact, she buries him twice, and the second time the guard reports that they have seen her. The passage above is her dialogue with Kreon, in which Antigone admits she has buried her brother: "when she appears in front of Creon she acts again, this time verbally, refusing to deny that it was she who did the deed" (Butler, 2000, p.7). In analyzing Antigone's *logos*, I follow Butler's considerations on the poignancy of linguistic issues imbued with political significance¹²²: facing Kreon, Antigone faces the state; opposing Kreon, she opposes the state and, thus, her language becomes political, and this appropriation helps her politically construct her own identity.

Furthermore, in my feministqueer analysis of Antigone's *logos*, I follow the philosopher in considering language and linguistic representations as fluid structures whose internal complexities allow different outcomes and possibilities (Kirby, 2007, p.68). My analysis draws on Butler's *Antigone's claim. Kinship between life and death* (2000), in which the philosopher declares that Antigone's language is an approximation to Kreon's language, the language of sovereign authority and political action: such an approximation is needed to overcome the female/male, feminine/masculine dichotomy. To clarify my thought, I assume, with Butler, that the discursive and political apparatus constitutes and serves the binary itself; thus, I explore Antigone's appropriation of the dominant, masculine and political language as a strategy to dismantle the gender binary originated by the same system she mimics: "Antigone can perform the act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes" (Butler, 2004, p.167). I thus observe to what extent the figure of Antigone responds to the questions: "Which possibilities of doing gender repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized?" (Butler, 2007, p.43). And also, "What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?" (Butler, 2007, p.189).

¹²¹ My translation of Sophocles' play. Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, lists a number of possible translations (2004, p.167): "I say that I did it and I do not deny it, 'Yes, I confess it', or 'I say I did it'".

¹²² In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive limits of Sex* (1993), Butler begins her introduction to a corporeal politics by noticing that there can be no access to materiality outside or before signification, and, by extension, no access to separate from language.

In my opinion, through her action of burying her brother against the edict and, furthermore, through her verbal claim, Antigone answers the above questions. Indeed, through her approximation to Kreon's *logos* - i.e., the political and patriarchal language - Antigone confuses and displaces the very patriarchal system that impedes her recognition:

Antigone's deed is, in fact, ambiguous from the start, not only the defiant act in which she buries her brother but the verbal act in which she answers Creon's question; thus hers is an act in language. To publish one's act in language is in some sense the completion of the act, the moment as well that implicates her in the masculine excess called hubris. And so, as she begins to act in language, she also departs from herself. Her act is never fully her act, and though she uses language to claim the deed, to assert a 'manly' act and defiant autonomy, she can perform that act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes (Butler, 2004, p.167).

In other words, "è proprio il passaggio verbale, più ancora dell'atto di disobbedienza rappresentato dalla sepoltura di Polinice, che scuote Creonte: è la parola [...] che capovolge i ruoli, che destabilizza" (Mariotti, 2015, p.104)¹²³. Hence, Antigone acts twice, through the concrete action of burial and by admitting to her action with the language of the *polis*: two different but not separate spheres of action. However, I do not entirely agree with Butler's view that Antigone departs from herself during her appropriation of the masculine, patriarchal language. I rather think that she employs a language that does not socially belong to her as a woman, but which has the potential of belonging to her. Indeed, through its appropriation, the heroine threatens the false, gendered roles: she mimics to the so-called masculine *logos* to show that it is not strictly a masculine possibility. Thus, she challenges the mentality that considers the male and the female attributes as completely different and belonging to detached spheres. In so doing, in my opinion, she shows that an interaction between gender attributes is possible and her own agency consists of this very verbal act: "her agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honour his command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty she refuses" (Butler, 2004, p.168). As Butler adds, agency emerges in the interstices of the different and often competing rules and the variations of their repetition (Butler, 1993). Indeed, it is in this slippage, dissonance and variation of roles and attributes that Antigone shows that the subversion of identities is possible.

Interestingly, her agency comes from performing "the language of the law in committing the act against the law [...] thus, in appropriating the rhetoric of agency from Creon himself" (Butler, 2000, p.11); in other words, her agency lies in her appropriation of the language of the masculine *polis*, whilst at the same time acting against it. It seems to me she appropriates the political language – that imposes gender fixity and differentiates the roles proper to women and to men – in moving against the political frame, so as to suggest the fluidity and the intersection of gender possibilities within the political panorama. Hence, there is a widespread confusion of levels:

¹²³ "More than the disobedient act of burying Polyneikes, the linguistic act upsets Kreon: the language [...] that overturns roles destabilizes him" (My translation).

Not only does the state presuppose kinship and kinship presuppose the state but ‘acts’ that are performed in the name of the one principle take place in the idiom of the other, confounding the distinction between the two at a rhetorical level and thus bringing into crisis the stability of the conceptual distinction between them (Butler, 2000, p.12).

As a consequence of the association of ‘kinship to feminine’ and ‘state to masculine’, “la parola di Antigone invece svela il segreto [...]: si fa donna-maschio in una completezza trasformativa che le restituisce complessità e tridimensionalità” (Mariotti, 2015, p.104)¹²⁴. Indeed, the action of making the language of the *polis* her own is an act of repetition of the norms that sustain the dominant system, and through such a repetition, Antigone displaces the division between identities that matter and those that do not. In particular, “she appropriates the rhetoric of agency from Creon himself” in order to claim her own (gender) identity as mattering (Butler, 2000, p.11). As Butler (1990, p.145) explains:

The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects [...] all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat.

Accordingly, such an assimilation-performance allows Antigone to assert her own (gender) identity in opposition to the patriarchal system that imposes distinct gender roles. In other words, according to Cavarero in the Italian preface to *Bodies that Matter*¹²⁵ (1996, XIV) “è proprio l’efficacia performativa del discorso a farli contare [i corpi, le identità] materializzando il loro significato”. Hence, the performative character of Antigone’s speech allows her own identity to be claimed, while appropriating the rhetoric of the other – i.e., Kreon, the symbol of patriarchal and normative law – whom she is opposed to. Thus, as Butler (2000, p.11) argues:

The claiming becomes an act that reiterates the act it affirms, extending the act of insubordination by performing its avowal in language. This avowal, paradoxically, requires a sacrifice of autonomy at the very moment in which it is performed: she asserts herself through appropriating the voice of the other, the one to whom she is opposed; thus her autonomy is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists, an appropriation that has within it traces of a simultaneous refusal and assimilation of that very authority.

Hence, Antigone expresses her autonomy through her approximation to the masculine *logos*, that is to say, she acquires her gender autonomy through the ‘parodic repetition’ (Butler, 2007) of norm. Usually the repetition of norm reinforces the hegemonic norm itself; indeed, parody is not subversive per se. However, in Antigone’s case, her repetition of political language is an excessive appropriation meant to disrupt the norms. According to Butler (2007, p.191) “the repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is

¹²⁴ “Antigone’s speech reveals the secret [...] it becomes the female-male in a transformative completeness that gives her complexity and three-dimensionality” (my translation).

¹²⁵ As the title *Bodies that Matter* makes clear, Butler’s aim is to extend “the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world” (1993, p.22). In my opinion, this is what Antigone does with her linguistic performance: she attempts to expand the very meaning of valuable identities beyond (gender) borders.

the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation”. In other words, the repetition of the gender norm entails its eternal validity and thus, its natural status:

Le norme e le regole relative al gender, pur presentandosi come ‘naturali’ e ‘normali’, incontestabili e vere, sono invece il frutto di una pratica citazionale costante: la loro validità sta tutta nella loro ripetizione (Guaraldo, 2014, p.16)¹²⁶.

But in Antigone’s linguistic practice, strategic repetition acquires the form of a parody of the patriarchal and political norms and so it allows her to invert the inner/outer distinction, and it also gives rise to a radical rethinking of its coherent gender sequences: a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine (Butler, 2007). Thus, Antigone becomes the performative subject – whom Butler speaks of, firstly in *Bodies that matter* (1993) – inasmuch as she acts through a repetitive and citational practice in order to undo the norms she cites: “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993, p.2). Indeed, adopting the language of the *polis* – namely, the masculine *logos* – she cites it and, through this reiterative practice, she finds the way to displace the very gender-related norms that enable the repetition itself. In other words, via and within gender-normative injunctions, she overturns the norms and confounds the binarism, exposing its fundamental unnaturalness. It follows that through her parodic citation of the political language, she reveals the performativity of each subject’s identity – as it is intended by Butler (2007, p.185):

She reveals that acts, gestures, enactments are generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

In sum, Antigone challenges the patriarchal law through the assimilation and repetition of the political and masculine *logos*. She cites – through a verbal action that constitutes a performance of the male gender – the normative *logos* and in such a way she parodies the political, masculine language and, consequently, the binary system itself. The fact that she is a woman is supposed to assign her a consequent female gender, but instead she acts and speaks according to what the dominant logic declares as a male behaviour – i.e., typical of a cisgender man. Therefore, even though parody itself is not subversive, Antigone’s adoption of the patriarchal language dynamics – that must not belong to her inasmuch as she is a woman – makes this kind of language repetition disruptive, parodic and truly troubling: Antigone becomes a figure who brings about problems inherent in the patriarchal order, through the confusion of gender roles that she encourages with her verbal act. In other words, such a performance has the strategic aim of undoing gender within its binary frame.

¹²⁶ “Even though gender norms and roles are considered natural and normal, indisputable and true, they are instead the result of a constant citational practice: their validity lies in their repetition” (My translation).

Furthermore, “the notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of original” (Butler, 2007, p.188). In such a way, Antigone becomes a performative subject who imposes a reconsideration of the political, masculinist and gender-binary order by challenging and destabilizing the patriarchal norm itself. Accordingly, Butler (2007, p.200) suggests that the practice of parody “serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived and mimetic”. Even though I agree with Butler, I also think that Antigone’s practice of parodying the patriarchal *logos* – besides confusing the differences among the two gender positions – undoes the fixity of both positions, while opening space for fluid identitarian possibilities and exposing the illusion of gender identity as stable and foundational.

In addition, Antigone expresses the possibility of rethinking subversive possibilities of sexuality and identity outside, before or beyond political power. Indeed, she challenges the state’s norms, embracing the political language and, thus, she becomes a subversive identity within the same political system that she tries to defeat. However, Butler (2007, p.42) notices that: “this critical task presumes, of course, that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination”. Indeed, Antigone acts within the matrix of power: she interrupts the acritical repetition of norms, but she simultaneously displaces them through her parody of the norm itself. Differently put, Antigone takes up the norms in order to challenge them and such an action “offers the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement” (Butler, 2007, p.42). Antigone becomes a performative subject not only through her action, but foremost through the social discursive means she adopts – the political and the patriarchal ones:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler, 2007, p.184).

Through such a political speech, she transgresses the very boundaries of gender that have been established by the political system. Therefore, according to Butler in *Antigone’s Claim. Kinship between life and death* (2000, p.5):

Antigone emerges in her criminality to speak in the name of politics and the law: she absorbs the very language of the state against which she rebels, and hers becomes a politics not of oppositional purity but of the scandalously impure.

In conclusion, Antigone’s approximation to the patriarchal *logos* is a performative parody of the patriarchal and normative system she resists. Indeed, through such a parody, the heroine claims her right to placing own identity beyond the fixed gender norms and attributes – or better, her existence at the intersection of gender roles. Hence, through a linguistic appropriation of the

rhetoric that is traditionally conceived of as belonging to the masculine sphere, Antigone destabilizes the normative binary system, and thus undoes the constituted and rigid status attributed to gender identifications, showing up its contingent immanency.

Third resistance: the desire of her brother

And another brother you love so much you want to lie down with
Him
“thigh to thigh in the grave”
or so you say glancingly early in the play
but no one mentions it again afterwards
(Carson, 2015, p.3).

Antigone: true sister, yet how sweet to lie upon my brother's
Body thigh to thigh
Ismene: your hear so hot, thou sister
(Carson, 2015, p.11).

Antigone speaks again; this time, her scream hides an ambiguous silence: what does Polyneikes represent for Antigone? What kind of bond connects sister and brother? I get stuck again, my reading gets slower and a stream of questions erupts in my mind, signalling a tension. I resist Antigone's voice as it is traditionally interpreted and I interrogate her 'hot desire'. In this respect, Carson takes a clear position – as a translator – in emphasizing Antigone's desire to sleep “thigh to thigh with her brother” and she further underscores the 'hotness' of this 'incestuous' desire that no-one else mentions¹²⁷. In fact, Carson stresses that Antigone desires her brother Polyneikes, wants to lie down with him and, furthermore, that this desire, once fulfilled, allows Antigone's recognition¹²⁸: “the only kind of recognition¹²⁹ she can enjoy is of and by her brother” (Butler, 2000, p.13). Differently put, the question that Carson implicitly asks, letting Antigone reply, can be translated thus: what kind of gender performance¹³⁰ might enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire? In order to find an answer through the character of Antigone, I intend to explore the link between desire, recognition and gender. Following Butler, I interrogate the way she introduces the notion of desire,

¹²⁷ Carson clarifies this position firstly in her dialogue with Antigone – placed before the *prologos* of the play – and secondly in the play itself. I stress the fact that Carson's translation emphasizes the relationship of love between Antigone and her brother, because other translators have proposed different interpretations that do not suggest the idea of an incestuous sexual desire: as Carson argues, “no one mentions it [Antigone's desire] afterwards” (2015, p.3).

¹²⁸ Interestingly, both Carson and Butler support this interpretation of Antigone's desire of her brother; conversely, other philosophers reject the idea that Antigone is in love with her brother. For instance, this erotic tension is denied by Adriana Cavarero, Hegel and Lacan. Irigaray, instead, argues that Antigone loves her brother only as her mother's son, that – in other words – she loves her mother. As I will argue below, I agree with Carson and Butler regarding Antigone's relationship with her brother.

¹²⁹ The idea of Antigone's recognition originates with Hegel's analysis. Recognition comes from kinship: Hegel considers that Antigone's recognition happens through her brother, because there is no desire among them. In explaining Hegel's theory, Butler clarifies his thought as such: “If there were desire in the relationship, there would be no possibility for recognition” (Butler, 2000, p.13). In my reading, I follow Butler who argues, instead, that Antigone's recognition happens through the desire of her brother.

¹³⁰ A performative act suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meanings (Butler, 2007).

as defined by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* (167). In this sense, desire is the desire for self-recognition that passes through the Other from the Self:

A desire that seeks its reflection in the Other, a desire that seeks to negate the alterity of the Other, a desire that finds itself in the bind of requiring the Other whom one fears to be and to be captured by; indeed, without this constituting passionate bind, there can be no recognition (Butler, 2000, p.13).

By desiring the Other, namely by being projected outside, desire represents the will to achieve self-recognition in the socio-political sphere. On this point, feminist theoretician Jessica Benjamin argues (1986) that the inextricability of the self and the other is expressed through desire: in being with the other, I have the most heightened experience of the self. Focussing her attention on the female desire, she adds that this desire must be conceptualized as the in-between space, connecting inside and outside, in a continuous flow of the self into the other that cannot be disrupted by falsely binary distinctions. Hence, besides the fact that desire looks for its fulfilment in the socio-political, outside space, it is also determined and reflected in social norms: “[...] desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not” (Butler, 2004, p.2). In *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987a) Butler examines the political resonance of desire. She explains that:

[...] The drama of recognition and labor must be seen as permutations of desire; indeed, what we witness in this chapter is the gradual specification of desire: self-consciousness as desire in particular. The notion of desire loses its reified character as an abstract universal, and becomes situated in terms of an embodied identity (Butler, 1987a, p.43).

Hence, as Butler notes, desire mirrors one’s necessity of self-affirmation: desire is always a desire for self-recognition that allows anyone to become constituted as a socially viable being (Butler, 2004). Furthermore, Butler, in line with the Hegelian tradition, links desire with self-identification and self-consciousness: “desire is always a desire for recognition and it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings” (Butler, 2004, p.2). Such a desire for self-recognition and self-affirmation is similar to what postmodernism marks as the desire to be that is set at the very heart of subjectivity¹³¹. Accordingly, Rosi Braidotti theorises a desire that is “not just libidinal desire, but ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being” (2011, p.125). Therefore, the fulfilment of one’s desire – i.e., the recognition of one’s own being – results in the expression of one’s identity and consequently aims at raising self-consciousness. Put simply, one reaches self-recognition and thus self-consciousness when one’s desire is accepted and respected in the social and political sphere. Accordingly, the desire of self-recognition in the political sphere

¹³¹This theory of desire as the desire for self-recognition and for self-being clearly breaks from the modernist framework, which is understood in relation to the legacy of Enlightenment. This legacy regards, indeed, the complicity of reason, and universality and it gives great value to the personal will, rather than the personal desire.

derives from the fulfilment of the personal desire that is the desire of the other. Moreover, one's desire is confronted with another's desire, and such a confrontation might produce displacement, if the satisfaction of the desire of the other is not reached: in this way, the self-recognition that comes from the identification with the desire of the other can bring to self-displacement. Conversely, if the desire of the other is made possible¹³², one can achieve self-recognition:

The recognition begins with the insight that one is lost in the other, appropriated in and by an alterity that is and is not oneself, and recognition is motivated by the desire to find oneself reflected there, where the reflection is not a final expropriation (Butler, 2000, p.14).

Accordingly, Antigone's recognition takes the shape of her desire to find herself reflected in her brother Polyneikes and, thus, she seeks her self-identification through her brother's desire. Accordingly, she becomes guilty because she refuses her state of repression, namely because she seeks for her identity to be recognized:

Antigone: [...] I mean
Can a person be so completely conscious
Of being unconscious
That she is guilty of her own repression
Is that what I'm guilty of
(Carson, 2015, p.21).

Thus, Antigone is guilty since she attempts to free herself from repression and, more importantly, she seeks to obtain recognition through her own desire. It follows that Antigone's desire for her brother is also the desire for her gender recognition. Indeed, as Butler explains (2004), if part of what desire wants is to get recognition, then gender, because it is animated by desire, wants recognition as well. Furthermore, the philosopher (2007) suggests that there is a strong link between sex, gender, and desire: desire reflects or expresses gender and, conversely, gender reflects or expresses desire. When such a relationship is constrained in a binary that allows only a certain desire proper to a certain gender, it institutes compulsory heterosexuality: for instance, it imposes that a female should desire a male and vice versa.

The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practice of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating [...] results in a consolidation of internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire (Butler, 2007, p.31).

In sum, the regulatory norms decree that desire depends on gender and both contribute to self-recognition; in particular, the dominant norms make self-recognition achievable through heterosexual relationships and thus through imposed, dualistic gender identities and desires. Indeed, this idea reaches the heart of my feministqueer reading, because I think that Antigone challenges

¹³²Here I refer to the socio-political conditions that, either implicitly or explicitly (i.e. legally), allow or prohibit the fulfilment of non-conform desires. More precisely, I refer for example to those socio-political conditions that ban or do not support the rights of either gender non-conform subjects, or subjects with non-heterosexual desires.

this exact system: by burying her brother and through her linguistic act, Antigone claims self-recognition – a social and political recognition – that represents a search for possibilities of self-identification beyond the gender binary trap. Symbolically, by desiring her brother, she desires differently from what the norm imposes – a cisgender man has to desire a cisgender woman¹³³ in a heterosexual relationship, without incest. Her desire is so different from what is considered normative, that Ismene, Antigone’s sister, declares its impossibility: “you are a person in love with the impossible” (Carson, 2015, p.11). It follows that Antigone embodies the essence of incest and simultaneously she challenges the notion of compulsory (hetero)normative and non-incestuous desire. In my opinion, the character of Antigone responds to the following questions Butler asks about the unliveability of gender non-conform subjects:

If I am a certain gender, will I still be regarded as part of the human? If I desire in certain ways, will I be able to live? Will there be a place for my life, and will it be recognizable to the others upon whom I depend for social existence? (Butler, 2004, p.3).

Accordingly, Antigone is the symbol of the deviant desire that challenges both society and her own existence. Furthermore, her own desire confirms the multi-faced nature of her being, her non-unitary and multiple nature. Rosi Braidotti describes, in *Nomadic Subjects* (2011), the non-unitary character of subjects, determined as they are by the changeability of desire: “sensuality, affectivity, empathy, and desire as core values in the discussion about the politics of contemporary nonunitary subjects” (Braidotti, 2011, p.89). Thus, Antigone, as a nonunitary subject, faces death for the impossibility of her contingent desire. On the one hand, Antigone represents the subject to whom life is prohibited due to the impracticability of her desire; on the other, she represents the subversion that comes from a desire that challenges political prohibitions. Indeed, Antigone represents the impossibility of accepting desires that are different from the normal and normatively established ones; consequently, “her fate is not to have a life to live, [rather] to be condemned to death prior to any possibility of life” (Butler, 2000, p.23). In line with this impossibility of living, her desire is related to loss and mourning. In this respect, Butler (2004, p.18) writes that “we are constituted as the field of desire” and such desire is often related to a loss, which might push towards a transformation: it might be the desire of someone we have lost.

In Antigone’s myth there are a multitude of losses. On this point, Carson writes: “for the family who lives there, things have gone irretrievably wrong” (Carson, 2015, p.3). Things have indeed gone wrong, starting from her father Oedipus, her mother and then both her brothers; these losses move her desire to subvert the normative roles that engendered them. In line with the fate of

¹³³ I use the expressions male man and female woman in order to stress the normative relationship between gender and sex that attributes a fixed male gender to a man (sex) and a female gender to a woman (sex). Such a normative and normalizing bond reinforces the monolithic logic that assigns one gender to each sex.

her family and with that of an identity that not only does not conform to, but also actively opposes norm¹³⁴, Antigone too faces death. Her entire life ‘serves death’; thus Antigone’s death signifies the impossibility to live and the unlived life of any identity deviant from those norms that impose either a female or a male identity and which teach that only hetero-normative and non-incestuous desire is acceptable. Thus, Antigone approaches the tomb that Kreon, symbol of the norm, has prepared for her. This scene stages death and the impossibility of surviving for those desires considered dangerous for society and deviant by the closed normativity of political power. Antigone, on the point of death, says:

Yet I shall lie in the bed of the river of Death
While I am still alive
Unwept
Unwet
Unloved
I go [...]
I died long ago.
(Carson, 2015, pp.29-30).

In this scene, Antigone meets the fate that has been hers all along. She dies because of her unliveable desire that does not grant her any possibility of recognition: incest itself, which makes of her life a living death (Butler, 2000). In other words, according to Butler (2007, p.2), “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms” that constitute our identity and are imbued with imposed desires. Therefore, this structuring of desire is clearly one way in which norms work their way into what feels most appropriate. On the one hand, Antigone struggles for her own desire that does not fit into these social norms, she struggles to find the conditions to express her desire and she is killed by the impossibility of doing this; on the other, Antigone’s action – and her incestuous desire – asserts a subversion and a displacement of the gender binary. This process thus proves that such a destabilization requires a desire that somehow escapes the hegemonic prohibitions of the economy of binary oppositions. In other words, she threatens the unity of gender identities and relationships within fixed binaries, by challenging the regulatory practices that seek to render gender identity uniform through compulsory (hetero)normative desires. In fact, by desiring her brother, Antigone destabilizes the heterosexual norms that impose relationships free from incest; furthermore, by desiring to die for the impossibility of her own desire, she refuses her normative role as a woman, namely, her duty to become a mother and a wife. In the myth, Antigone claims:

No wedding
No wedding song
No wedding chamber

¹³⁴ I use the expression ‘non-conform identity’ to indicate an identity that does not align to norms. This term applies to Antigone because of her desire and because of her gender identity that appears as ambiguous, neither completely female nor male, but both, and thus is deviant from the gender binary impositions.

(Carson, 2015, p.29).

By denying the roles imposed on her as a female woman, Antigone challenges and merges the very norms attributed to gender identities. Accordingly, I think that the term ‘wedding chamber’ well signifies the impracticability of these roles: it signifies precisely its own impossibility, because the word chamber – which is related to the funerals – conveys the destruction of the institution itself. In analysing this passage, Butler (2000) emphasizes Antigone’s ambiguous gender identity that makes the actualization of (hetero)normative roles impossible – such as, for instance, the role of mother and wife in a heterosexual bond:

Certainly, she does not achieve another sexuality, one that is not heterosexuality, but she does seem to deinstitutionalize heterosexuality by refusing to do what is necessary to stay alive for Haemon, by refusing to become a mother and a wife, by scandalizing the public with her wavering gender (Butler, 2000, p.76).

Accordingly, not only does she attempt to deinstitutionalize heterosexuality by refusing the gender roles attributed to her as a woman, but she also seeks to achieve her own identification through an incestuous and scandalizing desire. In this respect, the taboo of incest, and the prior taboo of homosexuality, appear as potentially generative moments of gender identity (Butler, 2007): through an incestuous relationship with her brother, Antigone seeks to reach her (gender) recognition. As a consequence, as Antigone’s myth shows, the prohibition – in the name of a compulsory heterosexuality and an idealized, normative family – of incestuous desire results in the impossibility of the subject’s recognition in society. Nevertheless, the political prohibition of Antigone’s ‘wavering gender’ proves to be useless: Kreon’s ban appears as a negative operation of power without consequent positive effects; rather, it paradoxically makes the very crime that it bars proliferate (Butler, 2000). Indeed, at the end of the play, Kreon, the patriarchal power, recognises the vagueness of his prohibition to such an extent that he prays to die:

Kreon: to die is my only prayer
[...]
take Kreon away please take Kreon away
Where can I look
Where can I turn
Everything I touch goes wrong
An unbearable fate has loaded itself onto my head.
(Carson, 2015, p.44).

In sum, on one hand, Antigone goes against the prohibition imposed by the political norms, seeking self-recognition and she dies for the subversion of (gender) normalcy; on the other hand, Kreon, the political man, struggles to prohibit the deinstitutionalization of normative rules and at the end he wishes to die because of the ‘wrongness’ produced by his own ban. Even though Antigone dies, what is at stake here is the heroine’s strength in challenging imposed (gender) normative constrictions. Importantly, for the sake of her beloved brother, Antigone challenges the notion of

(hetero)normative family, as Carson (2015, p.5) argues: Antigone overturns the notion of “ [...] family, what we call a family”. Therefore, Antigone’s desire can be called queer, representing as it does an injury to the normative family. As Sarah Hamed notices in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004, p.107):

One may be? Shamed, for example, by queer desires, which depart from the ‘form’ of the loving nuclear family. Queer desires become an injury to the family, and to the bodily form of the social norm; something to be concealed from the view of the others.

Accordingly, through her queer desire, the heroine shows the extent to which the family is not a natural entity, but rather a construction and a private property of the state. By emphasizing its constructed essence, Antigone challenges the monolithic, heterosexual and normative status of family, and suggests other possibilities¹³⁵. In fact, by acting on the ‘hot desire’ of her brother, she recalls those relations that are legally denied¹³⁶ and sheds light on a notion of family that does not conform to the norm and that, moreover, emphasizes the fallacy of the norm itself. Indeed, Antigone’s incestuous desire, for its own nature, challenges not only the entity of the hetero-normative family, but above all a general interdiction to straightness: “the straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality, represents its major interdiction” (Witting, 1992, p.28). Therefore, Antigone challenges the familial status quo as it has been ratified by its own normative, political and social organizations. In the dialogue between Carson and Antigone, the author emphasizes the heroines’ non-normative origin:

Oh sister and daughter of Oidipous

[...] to have a father who is also your brother
means having a mother who is your grandmother
(Carson, 2015, p.3).

Indeed, her family’s non-normative trend had begun already with her father Oedipus, and disrupts the coherence of gender difference:

Her crime is confounded by the fact that the kinship line from which she descends, and which she transmits, is derived from a paternal position that is already confounded by the manifestly incestuous act that is the condition of her own existence, which makes her brother her father, which begins a narrative in which she occupies, linguistically, every kin position except ‘mother’ and occupies them at the expense of the coherence of kinship and gender (Butler, 2002, p.72).

Furthermore, Ismene, Antigone’s sister, also outlines the non-normative status of their family¹³⁷:

¹³⁵ I will often use the expression ‘other possibilities’, firstly in reference to the previous chapter, where I looked at myths as a source of feministqueer possibilities, and secondly to underscore the necessity of considering other possibilities, different from the institutional and normative ones.

¹³⁶ In my opinion Antigone’s incestuous desire is a call for overturning the notion of non-normative relationships. More generally, her brother’s desire sheds light on all the relationships that are regarded as non-normative, such as, for instance, homosexual relationships and non-heterosexual families.

¹³⁷ Antigone’s father, Oedipus is also her brother; therefore Antigone is her brother’s daughter. Oedipus is son of his wife Jocaste. It is clear that this family’s structure is not the alleged normative one.

Think, sister –
 father's daughter
 daughter's brother
 sister's mother
 mother's son
 his mother and his wife were one!
 our family is doubled tripled degraded and dirty in
 every direction
 (Carson, 2015, p.10).

Thus, “ella rappresenta una parentela fuori della norma; piuttosto la famiglia anomala, estranea alle leggi famigliari istituzionali” (Mapelli, 2015, p.108)¹³⁸. In line with this non-normative status, the whole *Antigonick* is marked by expressions that symbolically emphasize Antigone's tendency to situate herself beyond imposed, normative borders: already at the beginning of the play, Antigone appears “out there” (Carson, 2015, p.9); Carson tells her: “you stand outside the door too” (Carson, 2015, p.3); and her sister advises her “o sister, don't cross this line” (Carson, 2015, p.10). From her liminal position, instead, Antigone “crosses the line” (Carson, 2015, p.10); and at the end, “she violates the limits of Atè through her desire” (Butler, 2000, p.51)¹³⁹. In other words, she always acts with the intention of ‘moving beyond the barrier’ of what normativity dictates, and such a motion implies transgressing the borders of political normalcy. Butler writes (2000, p.51): “The limit in question is one on which she establishes herself, a place where she feels herself to be unassailable”. Indeed, she finds herself in the liminal dimension that is ‘beyond borders’ and that characterizes her ‘beyond binaries’ status: she is eternally ‘in the making’ and such a wavering condition determines her own autonomy. As far as her autonomy is concerned, it is a point that Carson's translation stresses and, even though one expects autonomy to bring freedom, instead, Antigone's autonomy does not. As Carson argues in her dialogue with the heroine:

to quote Kreon you are autonomos
 a word made up of *autos* ‘self’ and *nomos* ‘law’
 autonomy sounds like freedom
 but you aren't interested in freedom
 (Carson, 2015, p.5).

Thus, Antigone's autonomy consists of taking upon herself her own *nomos* which is different from the norms of the *polis*. In this respect, the following words pronounced by Kreon underscore the *autos* – self-sufficient – nature of the heroine, who expresses her own identity by deviating from the dominant norms and by developing an in-between and in-becoming self-identity.

Kreon: you're autonomous
 autarchich
 autodidactic

¹³⁸ “She represents a kinship beyond norm; an odd family, one that does not respect the institutional familial norms” (My translation).

¹³⁹ Butler (2000, p.78) asks: “how do we understand this strange place of being between life and death, of speaking precisely from that vacillating boundary?”

autodomestic
autotherapeutic
autohistorical
autometaphorical
autoerotic
and
autobeguilded
(Carson, 2015, p.20).

Chorus: you chose to live autonomous
and so you die
(Carson, 2015, p.29).

Therefore, Antigone develops her autonomy by fighting for her own desire; and, furthermore, “her autonomy is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists” (Butler, 2004, p.168). Nevertheless, Antigone’s autonomy does not exclude relationality, as Butler (2004, p.19) argues: “it does not suffice to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one”. Accordingly, I think that the heroine’s development of autonomy is enhanced by her desire in the relationship with her brother: she becomes autonomous because she acts for the sake of her desire that is against the normative law. Thus, her autonomy has a relational side, or to put it another way, it has a relational source that concerns the desire for her brother. What is poignant is that such autonomy determines her in-between and non-yet status – she acts against the law but within the law; she is between life and death; she enacts what is conceived of as both a male and as a female action. In other words, such autonomy pushes her to seek the recognition of her own identity beyond the borders of normalizing norms.

Final reconstruction of feministqueer meaning: Antigone is a queer identity

Antigone symbolizes “the convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire” and family (Butler, 2007, p.32). She “deploys and redistributes the terms of a binary system [and in doing so she] disrupts and proliferates those terms outside the binary itself” (Butler, 2007, p.32). Indeed, she is not categorizable within the gender binary as it stands; and, as a free-floating¹⁴⁰ subject, she suggests the possibility of a gendered experience that cannot be grasped through the hierarchizing binary grammar. Hence, Antigone leads herself and the feministqueer reader to the powerful problematization of gender roles and she implicitly gives voice to those individuals who have been excluded or erased by the falsely exhaustive accounting of the human condition that traditional and normative roles have presumed to offer (Chanter, Kirkland, 2014). As

¹⁴⁰ Term used by Butler – especially in *Gender Trouble* (2007) – along with ‘wavering gender’, to define queer identities.

such, Antigone's figure displaces both the postulation of (gender) identity as a principle determined to increase hierarchal order and its subsequent controlling purpose: "[she] exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory function" (Butler, 2007, p.33).

Therefore, I believe she is a queer identity which calls into question "the coherent gender sequence [and] the dissonant play of attributes that fail to conform to sequential or causal models" (Butler, 2007, p.33). In so doing, she questions and challenges the 'culturally established lines of coherence' that have been constituting the acceptability of identity (Witting, 1985): the female/male fixed binary, normative desire and familial normalcy. Indeed, Antigone "mobilizes possibilities of 'subjects' that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (Butler, 2007, p.40). To sum up, the resistances that I personally face in reading *Antigonick* – Antigone's unclear definition of her gender identity, her 'hot' desire, her appropriation of the patriarchal and political *logos*, and her non-linear familial structure – constitute the moments of effective inversion, subversion and displacement within the terms of her constructed queer identity.

Hence, I personally think that the social construction of her gender as fluid and wavering is expressed through the action of burying her brother, through her verbal confirmation of this deed, through her desire for her brother and finally, through her need of self-recognition. In such a way, her gender takes place as a challenge "to both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler, 2007, p.186). More precisely, Antigone's gender identity arises through her drag that fully subverts the distinction between inner/outer – i.e. female/male identity. It takes place through a symbolic cross-dressing that ridicules the normative models presented as original by the dominant system: the gender binary framework, the normalcy of (gender) identity and the compulsory heteronormativity.

At its most complex, [drag] is a double inversion that says, "appearance is an illusion". Drag says "my outside appearance is feminine, but my essence inside is masculine". At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; "my appearance outside is masculine but my essence inside is feminine (Newton, 1972, p.103).

The cultural practice of drag refers to "the cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (Butler, 2007, p.187) and such stylization dissolves normative paradigms, undoing gender constructions and obligations. Accordingly, I employ the expression 'dragged Antigone', because, as I have argued, when Antigone refuses to define her gender identity and, first and foremost, when she admits her deed, through the assumption of the political and masculine *logos*, she acquires an in-between, ambiguous, transgressing and subversive identity which reveals her status as dragged. Through her dragging, the heroine declares that reality and gender identifications are not fixed but rather changeable and complex:

Drag is an example that is meant to establish that ‘reality’ is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be. The purpose of the example is to expose the tenuousness of gender ‘reality’ in order to counter the violence performed by gender norms (Butler, 1999, XXV).

Hence, Antigone gives legitimacy to identities beyond the binary regulatory fictions and she troubles the regulatory system through the parodic repetition of the dominant norms. As Cavarero argues (1996, VIII)¹⁴¹:

L’ambivalenza del drag è tuttavia infinita, anche nel suo uso iperbolico [...] Il lavoro è complesso, ambiguo, rischioso. Poiché la forza della norma sta nella continua ripetizione e citazione che ne conferma l’autorità, anche il lavoro iperbolico del drag deve seguire la legge della ripetizione; trasformandola però in mimesi e parodia che ne dissolve gli effetti di stabilità¹⁴².

Indeed, the heroine develops her dragged character during the repetition of the norms that impose the (gender) binary economy through her appropriation of the patriarchal *logos*; consequently, she disrupts (gender) normativity itself. Thereby, she develops her autonomy in her drag, that occurs through the parodic, thus excessive and ridiculous appropriation of the (gender) norms she opposes. In this way, Antigone both refuses and assimilates the norms: such simultaneous appropriation/denial of gender norms is the nature of drag itself, which in such a way presents identity as non-stable, non-exclusive and non-preclusive. In other words, becoming dragged, Antigone parodies the notion of an original or primary gender identity. Thus, she reveals how the relationship between first identification – which links one’s gender identity to one’s biological sex – and subsequent gender experiences must be rethought. Moreover, through her verbal claim – in which she confirms that she buried Polyneikes’s body – Antigone makes a parodic performance of the male gender, and unveils the imitative and temporal character of gender itself: “drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – and its contingency” (Butler, 2007, p.187). In other words, Antigone’s drag becomes a contingent parody of the normative system – the patriarchal, the masculine and the heterosexual one:

Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of casual unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary (Butler, 2007, p.187).

Such a parodic performance shows the mimetic nature of gender itself, which is not imitation of an original identity, rather it is ‘an imitation without an origin’. To be more precise, it is a production, which in effect postures as an imitation (Butler, 2007). The perpetual displacement that Antigone puts into action – through action and *logos* – constitutes the fluidity of her identity and suggests an openness to re-significations. In sum, following Butler (2007), I think that

¹⁴¹In the preface to *Bodies that Matters*, Italian version (1996).

¹⁴²“The ambivalence of drag is infinite [...]The work is complex, ambiguous and risky. The validity of norm lies in the repetition and citation that confers it its authority; drag must follow the law of repetition as well, by parodying it, in order to dissolve its stable effects” (My translation).

Antigone offers the re-signification of gender as a changeable, temporal and contingent identification:

An identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts [...] This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality (Butler, 2007, p.191).

In other words, Antigone exhibits the possibilities of gender transformations that lie in the parodic citation, which exposes the effects of given identities as mere temporal constructions:

The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'. The possibility of gender transformation are to be found in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity. (Butler, 2007, p.192).

Accordingly, the heroine shows up gender's performative character and the multiple possible gender configurations, outside the restricting landscape of a masculinist domination and a compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 2007). Antigone's "parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (Butler, 2007, p.188). Even though her verbal and practical actions – and thus, her gender meanings – take place within the hegemonic, misogynist cultural and political scene, they are nevertheless mobilized through their parodic recontextualization so as to become an effective challenge to the normative systems. Therefore, Antigone ends up symbolizing the abject, the realm of the excluded that challenges the political and patriarchal system to open up new identificatory possibilities. Indeed, in line with Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993), I think that Antigone, by acting against the law of the *polis* - i.e. the masculine power - represents a subject that fails to internalize 'the appropriate and coherent character' – as dictated by socio-political norms. Again using Butler's words, Antigone represents the body that fails to materialize and thus provides "the necessary and constitutive outside" – the excluded element which reaches the limits in order to shatter them:

The task is to refigure this necessary outside as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime (Butler, 1993, p.53).

Accordingly, Antigone challenges the regime of truth, pointing "not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits of representation and representability are exposed" and blurred (Butler, 2012, p.2). As an abject being, she points to "the vulnerability of people not considered to be fully legal subjects, not regarded as properly human, not seen as worthy of the conferral of the right to be participants of a democracy" (Chanter,

Kirkland, 2014, p.19). Nonetheless, as an excluded being that fails to qualify as a proper and coherent subject – as imposed by the regulatory system – she does not materialize the norm; rather, she becomes the necessary outsider which challenges the “symbolic hegemony” of the patriarchal and hetero-sexual realm (Butler, 2000, p.16). As Chanter and Kirkland (2014, p.6) argue: “She refashions her political exile into a critique of political systems that exclude her in advance from representation, even as they depend on her and require her to be an unacknowledged resource”.

In criticizing political systems, she imposes a radical rearticulation of which subjects matter; of those that act through a “process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (Butler, 1993, p.9). In addition, Antigone compels us especially to rethink identities outside the binary constrictions imposed by regulatory regimes and, as a consequence, she urges us to rethink the fixity and the rigidity of (gender) boundaries. Hence, while Kreon represents these normative constrictions – according to him, identificatory projections must be regulated by social norms – Antigone is the subject-symbol of the undoing of such a restrictive set of norms: she operates within these norms and the normative environment but against it, in order to claim her (gender) identity outside of the imposed binary and her autonomy as a subject within the political sphere. In sum, Antigone proves that new (gender) possibilities, which contest the coherent configurations of any binarisms, are possible only within practices of repetition that subvert the notion of identity as fixed and stable: “it is only within the practice of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (Butler, 1993, p.9). As such, Antigone deinstitutionalizes (gender) oppositions and makes room for a variety of incoherent (gender) possibilities.

Thus, she reveals other possibilities of action and language, by staying within the political system but in a critical and subversive way that allows her to become an anti-normalcy subject and to fight for her self-recognition. She is within the political sphere, but she occupies a displacing position, due to her wavering gender and opposition to the standards of familial normalcy that impose a heterosexual and monogamous family. Butler (2000, p.72) argues that, while she is “entangled in the terms of kinship, she is at the same time outside the norms”. In this respect, it is important to read her relationship with her brother from a feministqueer perspective, because it allows to rethink the familial structure¹⁴³ as an entity that can be deviant from the norm: Antigone exposes a model of family that does not approximate the norm, inasmuch as it does not mirror regulatory fictions; rather, she disembodies and then undoes the ideality of the familial norm.

¹⁴³ Butler (2000, p.73) notices that “various projects to revamp or eliminate family structure have become important components of the feminist movement and, to some extent, have survived in contemporary queer movements as well, the support for gay marriage notwithstanding”. In this respect, I believe that any feministqueer reading must be committed to rethinking the familial structure as not natural, obligatory or already defined.

In the end, Antigone dies, not because of her impossibility to conform to normalcy, but due to the impossibility of a social and political recognition of her being beyond normalcy. Nonetheless, her deed remains, as a social intervention that destabilizes the social structure:

Her deed represents a trespass on the norms of kinship and gender that exposes the precarious character of those norms, their sudden and disturbing transferability, and their capacity to be reiterated in contexts and in ways that are not fully to be anticipated (Butler, 2000, p.24).

Thus, though Antigone's claim results in her death, this does not coincide with the end of her political claim: "when one makes those claims, one makes them for much more than oneself" (Butler, 2004, p.16). Her claim is both political and anti-political; indeed, the heroine adopts the language of the sovereign in talking back to Creon and the language of kinship to bury her brother, but she perverts both. As Butler (2000, p.6) argues: Antigone's value lies in "the social deformation of both idealized kinship and political sovereignty that emerges as a consequence of her act" and the language she adopts lies outside any oppositional binary and exposes the limits of dualistic thought.

As such, her potential lies in a non-yet status that problematizes the categories of identity, state, family and citizenship; "moreover, the 'non-yet' status of Antigone is not only an effect of her original story but is continuously performed as she is dragged through time" (McBean, 2016, p.36). In this respect, following Freeman (2000, p.742) Antigone becomes "a placeholder for possibilities that have yet to be articulated". In particular, she inhabits a wavering gender identity that is 'non-yet' and contingent: she carries a certain kind of potential, a non-yet quality: in sum, she represents a figure beyond rigid borders and especially beyond the female-male binary. In *Antigonick*, Carson clearly expresses Antigone's in-between and non-yet potential:

for I'm a strange new kind of in between thing aren't I
not at home with the dead nor with the leaving
[...]
one final intersection
(Carson, 2015, p.30).

Such ambiguous position and her non-yet status is caused also by her being in-between, at an intersection, and assemblage of multiple injunctions that make the heroine a queer symbol. As Tina Chanter and Sean Kirkland notice in *The returns of Antigone* (2014, p.6):

Antigone situates herself at the threshold of various gendered conceptual binaries, between the familial and the political, the passive and the active, in a liminal condition that makes her particularly well suited for the project of queering traditional exclusionary logic.

In addition, such a liminal position is what confirms her constitutively excluded status. Indeed, she is female and thus banned from the political sphere by the male Kreon, symbol of the political system: her condition as a woman means that the place of masculine sovereignty is closed off to her (Kramer, 2008). Nevertheless, by acting against the state and repeating her act through an

appropriation of the political language, she confounds the distinction between male and female, between kinship and state, and she claims her in-between status; consequently she is excluded even more radically because of her unfitting identity. Accordingly, Butler (2000) notices that she confounds the boundaries of kinship, state, family, femininity and masculinity, perverting both realms through her act of defiance against Kreon's edict, pushed by her desire. As a consequence, condemned to an indeterminate space, suspended between the living and the dead, because "she has transgressed the distinction that define the boundaries of the political, and especially those of gender" (Kramer, 2008, p.182), she finally becomes a queer identity with a political function. "She is a deject, an abjected figure" (Chanter, Kirkland, 2014, p.6) and it is precisely this 'outside' and in-between position, from which Antigone speaks, that allows her to acquire a political function. In other words, she becomes a queer identity that responds to the question: "what challenges does that excluded and abjected real produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter?" (Butler, 1993, p.16). Indeed, Antigone challenges her own excluders and the exclusion from the political and normative sphere itself; she appropriates the hegemonic and normative voice to impose her identity beyond restrictions; she finally transgresses all normative roles from inside the system she is fighting.

A child figuring in her very existence incest, transgression of norms, a daughter cast out of a symbolic matrix, a figure without whom the symbolic would not, could not, exist, a figure who nonetheless cannot be properly represented in and by the very symbolic that excludes her, the very symbolic she founds in and through that founding yet contingent, constantly reworkable socio-symbolic exclusion (Butler, 1993, p.16).

Hence, Antigone is excluded by the political system she attempts to belong to and simultaneously to overturn; as Butler notices, she is constituted by her position outside the normative panorama but simultaneously she acts within the system itself: "in this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (Butler, 1993, p.3). From this "outsider status" (Butler, 2000, p.82) she acts, in order to undo the normative categories – namely those of gender, family and state – so as to become a "political signifier" (Butler 1993, p.191). Following Butler, I think that Antigone well embodies such a role of political signifier: in other words, she represents the abject who enacts a mobilization and contestation of the norms, whose potential force brings about the transformative disruption of structured categories. In other words, Antigone becomes the agent that propels a transformation: "without an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations of domination within society" (Butler, 2007, p.35).

Finally, my feministqueer reading engages with the queer side of the heroine, who has revealed herself as a performative signifier, crucial to an open and 'beyond binaries' notion of

futurity¹⁴⁴. In addition, drawing on Butler (2007), I remain invested in the ‘non-yet potential’ of Antigone’s queer identity, because she seems to point towards a more optimistic future:

Her name serves as a call to disrupt settled interpretative landscapes, to rearrange hierarchies, to realign borders, to cross boundaries, to reimagine futures [...] Antigone represents the as-yet-unrealized and thus turns to Antigone place hope in the possibility of a future realization (for women, feminist political subjects, queers) (McBean, 2016, p.19, p.37).

In my opinion, what Antigone leaves us, as feministqueer readers, is her demand to attend to those identities excluded by the dominant norms, to attend to those lives that are made impossible by normative exclusions – with a special concern for those gender identifications that are excluded inasmuch as they do not conform to the binary. In my reading, Antigone is not a feminine signifier subordinated and excluded by the binary opposition masculine/feminine (Butler, 1993), she becomes rather a dragged queer subject, who is continuously in the making and who, above all, confounds the strict gender binary economy, due to her floating, non-yet status that cannot be entrapped within rigid identitarian boundaries. Indeed, Antigone is queer inasmuch as she not only disrupts the binary of heterosexual normalcy, but also desires to bring the female/male opposition to the point of collapse (Fauss, 1992). She is queer, therefore, inasmuch as she is a symbol of disruption that transgresses and subverts the heteronormative dichotomy; furthermore, she is queer because she aims at undermining the coherent (and essential) gender configurations and the social desire for a neat arrangement of dichotomous sexual and gender differences (Luhmann, 1998). Therefore, Antigone may well catalyze an intervention in political normalcy: she does not conform to the fixity imposed within a double binary, but rather she calls for the recognition of a fluidity beyond restrictions but within political and social structures. Hence, she fights for identities to be granted a place simultaneously inside and outside norms. In sum, even though Butler points out that “she is not quite a queer heroine” (2000, p.72), it is my belief that she is: her fate is the one of many who would transgress the line of (gender) acceptability so as to intervene in normalcy. Borrowing Butler’s words (1993), I argue that Antigone enacts:

The contentious practices of ‘queerness’ [that] might be understood not only as an example of citational politics, but as a specific reworking of abjection into political agency that might explain why ‘citationality’ has contemporary political promise (Butler, 1993, p.21).

By citing the norms, Antigone becomes a contingent, wavering, queer subject who works towards the undoing of gender categories within the political scenario: “she is aberrant, itinerant,

¹⁴⁴ Similarly to Butler’s analysis, my reading is future-oriented and this is, indeed, what Edelman takes issue with in *No future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). For Edelman, Butler’s reading can only widen the realm of what can be intelligible, but it maintains the same temporal privileging of the future that Edelman argues does not challenge the remit of the political. Conversely, I think that my future-oriented reading, moving from Butler’s analysis, aims at reconsidering the bodies that matter and furthermore at revaluing the notion of the legitimacy of undergoing changes over time. In such a way, I believe that Antigone opens up a future in which the unthinkable become thinkable.

queer, queered, and queering figure” (Chanter, Kirkland, 2014, p.6). Alongside this, *Antigonick* – Carson’s translation-transference beyond time binds – brings to light the contingent, queer temporality of Antigone’s identity. In other words, by focusing on the (a)temporality of the figure of Antigone, *Antigonick* also shows the contingent status of her (gender) identity, namely the temporality of her drag. Consequently, the ongoing dragging of Antigone means that she does not merely remain in the past, but her desire moves her through numerous places, accruing meaning as she travels (McBean, 2016). Thus, to inquire her temporal drag – namely her non-yet status – means to explore “the past’s possibilities for various present tenses” (McBean, 2016, p.36) and to listen to her persistent claim to the non-yet that characterises her.

Therefore, my feministqueer reading of *Antigonick* – beyond the particular configuration of Antigone’s drama – argues for the transcendence of gender dualism, and therefore of gender bias, in the name of relationality and changeability. Hence, it is a method to go beyond sexual-difference-inspired analysis; in addition, it represents a way of making Antigone’s claim heard in times that would silence her non-uniform and displacing echo. In such a way, my feministqueer reading is a strategy to redefine Antigone’s myth and move it away from dualism, and to approach the myth not as an isolated item locked in binary oppositions. Rather, I understand Antigone’s figure as an identity in process and, in so doing, I have decoded the network of connections that link the myth to an entire socio-political system¹⁴⁵. In other words, dragging Antigone, I draw on her (a)temporality to make her queerness challenge the supposed present coherence, and I underscore her feministqueer timing, which insists on the unsettling and the undoing of past (gender) figurations, taken as linear and untroubling. Hence, in returning to Antigone, in turning back towards her, in dragging the heroine along, we enter the sphere of parodic and aberrant repetition that undoes any binary; we enter a place ‘beyond’: there is something non-yet about Antigone that flourishes by her drag, and which places her in a space beyond binaries. In line with this, my feministqueer reading marks the profound transformations and site-specific illuminations that result from transporting, queering and liberating Antigone from the yoke of gender normalcy.

¹⁴⁵What I have done is to bring Antigone into my socio-political context, unravelling her queer identity. Such a practice of connection between the text and my socio-political system is described by Joan Scott, in “Decostructing Equality vs. Difference”, when she refers to the new materialist theory of the text and of textual practices (1990). Here I quote her view of this relationship in reference to myth, and to my practice of feministqueer reading.

Ἔξοδος¹⁴⁶

Chorus: "here comes Kreon

dragging his

dragging his

dragging his what" (Carson, 2015, p.42).

Antigone has left us, without a word. What can this mean?

Messenger: It troubles me, too; yet, she knows what is best.

Chorus: It may be so: but I fear this deep silence.

Messenger: Do not fear it! Her silence has already got a voice. Antigone now, finally, gets a new voice through her tombstone silence.

Chorus: Her voice brings forth a new truth, but Kreon, as others, was late in learning it.

Messenger: Yes, she has died, because this was set as her fate. Nonetheless, she is still alive, around us, around those who want to get to the truth and she appears claiming her new voice, her new identity, too. Antigone, through her silent death has finally gained her speaking life, as she wanted it to be. She has a powerful resonance among those who see things with open eyes and embodied feelings; among those who go deep into her silences; among those who resist to the restrictions of the polis. Antigone has got her own revenge.

Chorus: "that's the future this is the present" (Carson, 2015, p.44).

Antigone has died; Antigone will live free from the bounds of her own identity. She will float above us, finally a complete being with her own multiple identities.

Messenger: Our hope has become true: looking at her from an embodied gaze, from a mind set beyond constrictions, has finally reconnected Antigone with Antigone herself.

Chorus: "last word

wisdom: better get some

even too late" (Carson, 2015, p.44).

There is wisdom where there are no dualistic restrictions, where each identity is free to flow in a multiplicity of possible identifications.

Antigone teaches us a lot, now we can heed her teaching, only now that she is rid of the heavy burden of the (gender) binary, looming over on her for centuries. In her returning silences, we can find ourselves, free as she is free to fly away.

¹⁴⁶ The ἔξοδος (i.e. exit ode) is the exit song of the chorus after the last episode. Aristotle defines it in the *Poetics* as "the whole of that part of a tragedy which is not followed by a song of the chorus" (Halliwell, 1987, p.43). In *Antigonick*, the exodus draws upon the death of both Antigone and Haimon and the despair of Kreon who realizes the ruin he has caused. Broadly speaking, this *exodus* is a reflection on human happiness and the possibility/impossibility of reaching it.

Conclusion

This dissertation represents my attempt, as a feministqueer researcher, to work towards the production of emancipating and inclusive knowledge, moving from my situated experience. Indeed, I began with my ‘local knowledge’, intersecting Classical and Gender Studies in order to derive alternative, feministqueer knowledge from classical myths. In particular, this project stemmed from my experience of engaging with classical myths, in the Italian school system, exclusively from a patriarchal, heteronormative and binary perspective that repeats the normative gender roles, entraps gender within fixed and immutable borders and, consequently, ends up securing normative hierarchies among genders. Moving from the educational experience described above, this research has sought to distance itself from the sexual-difference-inspired readings and, at the same time, to provide methodological instruments useful in reading classical myths in a way that moves beyond the female-male binary, in order to bring to light multiple possibilities of identification. Thus, I have employed a classical myth as a medium to share feministqueer knowledge and, conversely, I have used feministqueer theories to analyse the myth through. Through this intersection, I have designed a feministqueer method of reading that moves beyond the traditional, Western, binary epistemology; furthermore, I have undone gender and legitimated gender plasticity.

I began the first chapter by discussing the premises of this project: firstly, I recalled my intersectional educational experience, which brought together literary methodologies with others deriving from Gender Studies. In so doing, I expressed my frustration with the kind of reading practice I was taught, which looked at myth – and at Antigone in particular – through a normative-binary lens, and my consequent desire to go about this practice differently. Subsequently, I elaborated on my position as a feministqueer researcher, whose feminism is inspired by a queer ethos of intervention against gender normalcy and desire to overcome the gender binary. Thirdly, I clarified the location of my project in the Italian context, where classical myths are still read through a dogmatic, binary and normative lens.

In the second chapter, I specified the aims of my work and its methodological framework. I expressed my strong commitment to intervene critically in the pedagogical system, proposing a reading method that could help raise awareness of the multiple possibilities of sex/gender identification; the conception of identity as a ‘practice’ and the notion of gender as a ‘performance’ (Butler, 2014). Hence, at a socio-political level, this dissertation advocates empowering and transgressing knowledge and feministqueer awareness especially, through an alternative practice of reading myths. Following on from this, I have explained the principle methodologies of my research: standpoint epistemology and diffractive reading. Both these methodologies have allowed

me to create a feministqueer close reading method. Indeed, Haraway's idea of local knowledge has granted validity to situated experience as a means of producing knowledge; furthermore, Barad's diffractive reading has defined the act of reading as a contingent and engaged relationship with the text which gives rise not to universal truths, but rather to transformative representations against the normative grain.

Consequently, my feministqueer reading method is situated and diffractive inasmuch as it is rooted in the reader's position and aims at foregrounding something new, namely a diffractive alternative, through an interference with the non-linearity of myths. Most importantly, in this section I elaborated on a set of guidelines for a close reading of myths through a feministqueer gaze: firstly, the reader must situate themselves, in order to define the objects of their analysis and to concretize the situatedness of the produced knowledge. Secondly, the reader must recognize their resistances to patterns of gender normalcy, namely to discourses that aim to enclose gender in closed and fixed restrictions. Thirdly, the reader must reverse these resistances in order to, finally, reconstruct a feministqueer meaning. Such a practice has no pretense of universality; rather, it is situated and partial. This notwithstanding, it intends to resist the naturalization of (gender) normative patterns along with the extrapolation from myths of unstable identifications in the making.

Subsequently, in the third chapter, I explored both feminist and queer pedagogies and placed my methodological project within a feministqueer pedagogical frame, emphasizing the main aim of the feministqueer method: to intervene in normalcy for the sake of emancipating and inclusive knowledge. In addition, following hooks and Luhmann's theories on critical education, I showed that reading myths with a feministqueer gaze is a pedagogical approach that aims to increase critical awareness regarding the complexity of gender practices and which may, thus, be seen as a 'practice of freedom'. Indeed, moving away from the text towards real life, such a method of reading can become a pedagogical tool, useful in schools to develop aware minds and, consequently, critical citizens able to include those identities which are excluded by normalizing systems of powers. Further on in this section, I made a point regarding the potential inherent in classical myths as narrations that travel through time and space and that, due to their floating essence, can convey contingent, multiple and changeable possibilities.

In the last chapter, I put the feministqueer reading method into practice, returning to the myth of Antigone through Anne Carson's *Antigonick*. Alongside all this, my research has attempted to rework the canonical, Western and sexual-difference-inspired reception of Antigone: the heroine has defied conventions, overturned expectations, redefined normalizing discourses, and finally opened up new possibilities. Putting into practice the steps towards a feministqueer reading, as

previously elaborated, I outlined a series of resistances to binary, heteronormative, sexist and patriarchal discourses, then, I reversed these resistances from their negative, binary position to a place that legitimates more fluid identifications and transcends the binary logic.

Through a self-conscious engagement with the play, I felt frustration and bodily tension in the three passages of the play where gender-normalcy discourses constrain Antigone's identity within the female/male binary, compulsory gender roles and heteronormativity. In particular, I resisted to Kreon and Ismene's speeches, which aim at distinguishing the female-male roles: in so doing, I emphasized Antigone's own resistance to any gender identification. I also felt a resistance in the face of the king's accusing Antigone of having appropriated the masculine, political *logos*: the heroine challenges, through this very parody, the patriarchal norms she appropriates. Finally, I showed a resistance to Antigone's desire of her beloved brother, as a symbol of incestuous desire: it outlines the consequences of desiring differently from what norms impose. Throughout this process, I dragged Antigone: the heroine thus appeared as a queer symbol of disruption that transgresses and subverts the heteronormative dichotomy. Furthermore, she reveals her queerness by disrupting the essential gender configurations and the social desire for a neat arrangement of dichotomous sexual and gender differences. Through her performative identity and parodic appropriation of the dominant norms, Antigone has become a wavering, queer, political signifier who has undone gender categories, within the political scenario.

In conclusion, throughout my dissertation, I have been committed to the formulation of a transformative, feministqueer reading method to move beyond the assumed (gender) norms. This practice has proved able to undo gender, deconstruct hierarchical, gender constructions and destabilize the perception of heteronormativity as natural. I have accomplished this by employing the feministqueer method to read Antigone's myth. Therefore, this method of reading has showed that, in order to destabilize relations of power and gender restrictions, it is necessary to explore and to resist the binary itself from within. In other words, to recognize and then resist the impulse to reproduce hierarchies is the first step towards its destabilization. In other words, not formulating new, monolithic interpretations that would determine new exclusions and differentiations, but rather questioning the patterns of gender normalcy can provide a useful method to deconstruct hierarchical binarisms and, thus, catalyse a social transformation.

Therefore, my feministqueer reading of myths has not only celebrated gender as a fluid practice, but it has also shed light on more inclusive conditions for maintaining life that resist models of assimilation and normalization. Furthermore, it has provided a counter-hegemonic and provocative reading that encourages the destabilization of conventional structures of domination, which uphold and maintain gender as a fixed and immutable category, constricted within a binary.

Above all, this method of reading aims at decolonizing minds from the normative either/or rhetoric, opening up all that lies 'beyond'.

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