Appropriating urban publics: spatial politics and women’s collective action in Milan (1968-2008)

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Appropriating urban publics: spatial politics and women's collective action in Milan (1968-2008)

Thesis submitted in June 2009 by

Elena Vacchelli

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Geography

Faculty of Social Sciences

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Abstract

This work is a contribution to the body of literature on city and gender and has been informed by contemporary debates within the academic field of geography. It merges feminist literature with studies of social movements and collective action, and theorises the political practices that involved the use of space of the Milanese women's movement. Urban publics are defined here as both institutional and physical space, including the bounded spaces that, during the 1970s, feminist activists have appropriated through their collective struggles. While the first appropriated sites of the women's movement in Milan were anti-institutional, contemporary women's organizations are described as extra-institutional, unbounded, non-hierarchical social actors networking in a space which is understood topologically. Separatism and the theory of sexual difference are offered as a resource in order to understand the space-orientated political practices of the Milanese women's movement. This work makes use of ethnographic methods which include reflexivity - as conceptualised in feminist geography - participant observation, archive research and semi-structured interviews.

The evolution of the feminist political subjectivity over the last 40 years in Milan has been mapped according to the politics of location and the idea that situated knowledges stem from a material positioning that involves narration and the body - according to an Arendtian definition of the political as public exposure in a collective arena. The shift from the domestic sphere (atopia) to the public sphere (topia) occurred, for the majority of Italian women, during the 1970s, which caused one sphere to contaminate the other. A second shift that this thesis takes into account is the one from a centralized form of government to urban governance. This coincides with a change in spatial practices within the women's movement, which increasingly became horizontally networked, project-orientated and based on the “everyday of women’s relationality”, which is a legacy of the feminist movement. Because of the extra-institutional status of Milanese women’s organization, their collective action opens up innovative spaces for a reconfiguration of the political outside traditional paths of political representation and accountability.
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Glossary

**Autocoscienza** Autocoscienza is the Italian version of consciousness raising-practices. The Italian name is kept here to highlight the auto-induced process directed towards the self. Its specifically Italian features are explained in Chapter 5. Autocoscienza represents the starting point for a psychoanalytical approach to feminism.

**Consultori familiari** Clinics providing free health service and advice to women on family related matters. Consultori familiari are the outcome of the 1970s feminist struggles and critique of a male orientated and sexist health service. Their existence and autonomy is currently being threatened by conservative suggested revisions of the Law no.194.

**Differenza sessuale** Sexual difference is the contested theoretical approach that mainly characterizes Italian feminism. Although not every feminist group in Milan identifies with it, the rejection of emancipation feminism, one of the starting points of differenza sessuale, is a shared position within contemporary Milanese feminism. Its features are outlined in section 2.2.1.

**Doppia Militanza** Double militancy describes the condition of these Italian women who were involved both in feminist politics and practices and were also active within the 1968 movement (alternatively, the ones who were active in radical, separatist feminism by keeping a reformist approach).

**Doppia Presenza** “Doppia presenza” describes these Italian women who, after accessing education and paid work, have to carry the burden of the caring work inscribed in their condition of women according to the Italian cultural establishment. The term was created within the group GRIFF at Political Science in Milan by the sociologist Laura Balbo. The meaning of “doppia presenza” is explored in section 3.1.1.
Libreria delle Donne Milan Bookstore Collective, it is the name of the Milanese feminist group who invented the theory of sexual difference and its articulations. In this work Libreria delle Donne and Milan Bookstore Collective are used interchangeably.

Pratica del fare Political practice, inaugurated within the Milan Bookstore Collective, oriented to appropriating physical space in the city.

Pratica dell’inconscio Literally, “Subconscious practice” is a political practice originated within Milanese feminism aiming to explore sexuality and the role of the female body in psychoanalytic terms. It is a kind of psychoanalytical practice that, rather than being situated within the psychoanalytic establishment, is situated within the women’s movement.

UDI Theoretical counterpart of sexual difference, UDI (Unione Donne Italiane) is an association for women’s emancipation, created in 1944 by women who were close to the PCI (Italian Communist Party), active in the campaign for women’s vote. UDI’s activities have often been associated with a specifically Marxist strand within Italian feminism (identified as “socialist feminism” in the Anglo-Saxon literature).
Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Milan: who, when and what

Milan is the cradle of Italian feminism. Industrialized at an early stage in comparison to other Italian cities, Milan is the place where the most antagonistic social conflict over capitalist production took place within Italy. It is also the first place where, in Italy, women entered paid employment and started challenging the traditional domestic role they had been assigned over centuries. It is the place where there were always strong connections between social movements and the city (Martin and Moroni 2007, Ruggiero 2000, Pozzi 2007, Balestrini 2004) and, more to the point, it is the place where the theoretical elaboration of feminist issues has assumed unique features. Inspired by the work of French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, the theoretical production of “differenza sessuale” marked the specificity of Italian feminism, and in particular, Milanese feminism.

This work aims to shift the focus from the merely theoretical perspective on feminist politics in Milan to an emphasis on the spaces of Milanese feminism within the ongoing debate on city and women. As such, it does not take into account the different ways in which it is possible to analyze the city by adopting a gendered perspective, which could include, for instance, studies on the spatialization of service work for migrant women, surveys on sex work or studies that take into account the emergence of queer theories within gender studies. Rather, it seeks to trace a genealogy of spatial politics where these intersect feminist politics. Italian feminism was influenced by French feminism in terms of its philosophy and by American feminism in terms of the political practices that shaped the movement. The collaboration with French feminists stemmed from two important meetings with the French group Psychanalyse et Politique in Pinarella di Cervia (1974, 1975). The main outcomes of these encounters were (a) the incorporation of feminist ideas with psychoanalytic methods of enquiry of the self, and (b) a psychoanalytic and Marxist analysis of the social role occupied until then by women in Western
society. This collaboration happened through the charismatic figure of Antoinette Foque (1999) and the influence that the work of Luce Irigaray (1974, 1984, 1990) had on the theoretical production of the Milan Bookstore Collective. What emerged from the work of Luce Irigaray and the Milan Bookstore Collective developed into the theory of sexual difference, which largely anticipated poststructuralist accounts of difference and inaugurated spatial practices such as separatism.

As will become clear throughout the thesis, sexual difference and separatism reflect a critical take on the typically Anglo-Saxon distinction between sex and gender. Despite a divergent take on Anglo-Saxon theories of gender, Italian feminism was also influenced by the American political practice of consciousness-raising imported in Milan by Carla Lonzi (1974). The Italian version of the practice of consciousness-raising, called “autocoscienza”, contributed to shape Milan-specific politics of space, including separatism and the appropriation of women’s spaces in the city. Autocoscienza also played a prominent role in the definition of women as an emerging political subjectivity and in the anti-institutional politics which were embedded in 1970s feminist agency.

The anti-institutionalism of Milanese radical feminism as well as the theory of sexual difference consisted of overt refusals to engage with institutions believed to mirror patriarchal power. This position was so intransigent that often Milanese radical feminists refused to collaborate with Marxist feminists, acting in non-separatist groups. Topics such as abortion rights or divorce were considered to be radical feminists’ exclusive domains as they didn’t want to leave important decisions concerning female bodies and annexed rights in the hands of male legislators. The refusal of emancipation-orientated feminism is also inscribed in this logic: women need to discard existing semantic and symbolic codes (and re-work new ones) through separatist spaces in order to achieve liberation, rather than assume a male shaped model of citizenship as an emancipatory target.

The research questions which have guided my work originated through the comparison of Berlin and Milan’s urban spaces from a gendered perspective. In Berlin, I found an extensive body of theory and political thought concerning urban space and women. My research has been informed by the work of German and British feminist geographers and urban sociologists who have written extensively on women in urban space. When I started looking into the same
debate in Italy, I discovered stimulating and challenging texts although, overall, the debate was more fragmentary. Italian geographers have only recently started to integrate feminist debate into the discipline (Cortesi et al. 2006) while architects, particularly the work of the Milan-based collective Vanda, have been aware of the debate and actively contributing to it since the early 1990s. I therefore took up the challenge of writing a PhD on the spaces of the Milanese feminist movement while being fully aware of the many different versions of feminism, the nuances and the disagreements of a contested genealogy including the legacy of earlier feminists on younger generations of Italian women. The main research questions guiding my thesis ask the following:

- How, in recent times, have Milanese women appropriated the polis?
- What kind of political practices influencing space are distinctive to the feminist movement in Milan and how has this changed between the late 1960s up to today?

*Polis* here is intended, in an Arendtian sense, as both the physical and the institutional spaces of the city. According to Hannah Arendt (1958)'s analysis, to be political meant to access the *polis* where everything was decided through discourse and persuasion. Violence was a pre-political feature of life outside the *polis* and was typical of the private sphere, where the paterfamilias used to impose his despotic power over the family members (which also included slaves). The distinction between a private sphere and a public sphere reflects the opposition between domestic and political spheres, which existed as separated entities up to the emergence of city-state in ancient Greece. While the appearance of society, at a later stage, according to Arendt, represents a domain which is, strictly speaking, neither public or private, what is relevant to this thesis is how a body of citizens come to appropriate urban spaces through their collective action and thereby constitute a new *polis*.

The subsidiary questions informing my thesis therefore concern the relationship between the changing practices of Milanese feminism and their spatial politics over the post-war period where space has contributed to the specificity of Milanese feminism. These are covered in Part 2 of the thesis, in relation to the empirical findings:
• What kind of spatial practices shaped women as political subjectivities in Milan? (Chapter 5)
• How did Milanese feminists appropriate space? (Chapter 6)
• What is distinctive about the active mobilization of resources for women’s collective action? (Chapter 7)
• In what ways do evolving governance practices allow Milanese women to inscribe their collective presence in the city? (Chapter 7)

In researching “women” we need to define who they actually are as political subjects and as a social category. The women of my research are, in general, Italian women and in particular those Milanese women who have challenged - and still try to challenge - traditional roles based on sexual difference. The sharp division of sexual roles within the Italian family has been forged by the fragmented regional traditions and nurtured by the Catholic Church’s hegemony over the Italian state for centuries. This particular configuration of power relations has confined the majority of Italian women within the walls of the domestic sphere.

In Milan, activists and leaders in women’s organizations have been both middle class and working class women who attempted to comprehend the reasons of their exclusion through establishing a shared experience of their differences and similarities. Other debates that have preoccupied the Italian so-called “second wave” women’s movement during the 1970s have been the question of sexual identities and the specificity of lesbian women. More recently, the question has become multilayered when issues of class and theories of sex\(^1\) have been complemented by a consideration of race. In Italy, the issues relating to black feminism came to the fore relatively late, in comparison to the emergence of this debate in other countries. This is partially due to the issue of migrant women, which was a relatively hidden phenomenon in 1970s\(^2\) Italy and only recently began to be exposed in the 1980s and 1990s. In my research,

\(^1\) Queer theories were initiated through the emergence of gay and lesbian studies (DeLauretis 1991, Kosofsky 1990, Sullivan 2003). They criticize the naturalness of gender identity by arguing that it is socially constructed and therefore individuals cannot be classified according to general terms such as “heterosexual” or “woman”. In this work however, I do not adopt the Anglo-Saxon approach to gender. As I make clear throughout the thesis, I look at gender as an intersection of sex, role and symbolical dimension, influenced by the specifically Italian and French debate according to Braidotti (1994).

\(^2\) In the 1970s, the presence of migrant women in Milan is invisible as they arrive as servants in bourgeois families and the kind of work they do is socially and spatially segregated. They do not make use of public services as their
the question of migration in the contemporary women's movement in Milan is addressed through one of the women's organizations selected as a case study in Chapter 6. A specific focus, however, on the question of race feminism and the issues facing migrant women in Milan would probably require a separate research project.

The focus of this research involves women who were the first to challenge the division of public and private spaces in the city, to appropriate urban spaces in Milan, and to acquire the necessary visibility to explore and expose their emergent identities. The new role of Milanese women was initially established through the appropriation of specific city spaces such as libraries, cafes, women's archives and bookshops, and through women's houses as exclusive spaces to rethink their difference and to define it politically. As will become clear throughout the thesis, over time, existing women's sites, and the ways in which they were appropriated and used, assumed different features according to the institutional background of the city and centralized decision-making processes. For instance, rather than a more loosely defined social movement, collective action from the 1990s onwards reflected a more specialized and professionalized way of conceiving political action. In this work, I have called this process a shift from a feminist movement to a more diffused form of feminism. A shift that, as an institutional background, has veered from government to governance. I have identified the role played by women's organizations in urban governance and how it is intertwined with their new spatial practices. The key questions therefore concern the definition of the newly appropriated public spaces and how spatial practices such as separatism have changed over time.

needs are satisfied within the family nucleus and this contributes to their invisibility (Tognetti, interview with the author, Milan 2006)

3 However heterogeneous, the association between "sex" and "race" in Italian feminism is systematic: the title of the review "Donne e' bello" [Women is beautiful] of the Milanese group Anabasi is clearly taken from the American slogan "Black is beautiful" as well as the name "Pink panthers" of a Bolognese group, which, with a certain ironic detachment, refers to the revolutionary Black Panthers movement in America. All these semantic and political connotations mark, sometimes through the choice of a militant language, the shift from a phase of claiming rights to a phase of revolutionary struggle (Perilli, 2007).
1.2 Space and women’s collective action

The main contribution of my thesis to feminist geography consists of an elaboration of the ways in which feminist politics and space are mutually constitutive. Feminist politics are exposed to different kinds of spatial readings that range, for instance, from women’s specific path evolving from a-topia (not having a space in the public sphere) to topia (having a space in the public sphere), to topologic readings of their collective action. Moreover, spatial politics in feminism have not just shaped political practices, such as separatism, but are also an important lens through which it is possible to interpret the main changes in feminist practices that have occurred from the late 1960s up to the present.

The key hypothesis of this work is that the ways in which Milanese women have appropriated city space changed overtime. For instance, the sites that were appropriated by Milanese feminists from the late 1960s have a rooted territorial link with the city which was situated within specific localities and reflected local characteristics. More contemporary forms of appropriation include women’s centres which developed in Milan from the 1990s onwards. Their activity has not necessarily been linked to territorially defined coordinates, but has included a more spatially wide set of politically defined interactions. This ranges from the involvement of various governmental tiers (such as Provincia, Comune or Regione) to the implementation and delivery of European directives on gender targeted policies. The different degree of boundedness to urban space, however, does not fit into fixed frameworks according to which only the women’s sites of the 1970s are to be understood as bounded, and only the contemporary organizational networks can be defined as unbounded spaces.

Rather, the proposed dichotomy is a structuring device to help understand the nature of feminist spatial practices in the 1970s and how they have changed in the context of other parallel dichotomies that shifted during the same period. These included the transformation of women’s politics and practices from anti-institutional to extra-institutional, the shift from feminism to forms of more diffused feminism, the change from movement-based to civil society-based collective action, and the move from government to governance. Mapping these transformations over the last 40 years, however, is not meant to create rigid dichotomies. In fact, they are far too easy to displace. For instance, in the 1970s, some women’s groups were
active at networking locally and, in some cases, even internationally; today, there are many women’s groups in Milan whose activities are territorially bounded. In the 1970s, there were as many institutional forms of feminism as in contemporary Milan, and we can easily find examples today of anti-institutional and movement-like feminist politics.

In any case, space is political for Milanese feminism as its appropriation has enabled the visibility of women and exposed them as a political entity in the male dominated political scenario of the 1970s. Today, the collective action of Milanese women’s organizations also configures space as political in a way that is probably less territorially rooted, but has an equal symbolic value in terms of visibility and the spaces it opens up for women’s contemporary forms of political action. Spatial practices such as separatism have shown that space is always political for feminism. The creation of an exclusionary and delimited space for women’s meetings represented a first step in a phase of collective identity building and is still, nowadays, both an institutionally accepted practice and a safe, protected place to which activists feel they must return when redefining their political aims and objectives. For instance, the collective action of women’s organizations in Milan has integrated some features of separatism as the leadership of the organizations and the aims and objectives of their activity concern only women.

As previously mentioned, space here is conceived as both an institutional and a physical space. However, the politics of location that I address in Chapter 5 add another layer of spatial reading which is intrinsically connected to the political practices of Milanese feminism. It is precisely the relational aspect of space that allows for a definition of the bounded and unbounded spaces, as both categories imply a spatial relation between an agent and a physical space. This, however, consists of a hybrid space, as shown in Chapter 6, and is open to changing power relations within it. Similar to power, space is also made up of in-between relations and is precisely the outcome of social relations and political practices. As shown in Chapter 7, the relational features of space and its openness is the context that enables a re-invention of feminist political practices.

A spatial practice which also has many political implications, such as separatism, suggests that relational space stems from women-oriented political action as the identities at stake are relationally constituted: if the “relationality among women” has been the motto of Milanese feminism, then the spaces that this relationality has created are not just those
between individual women. They are also collective spaces of political action that women's organizations seek to create outside formal institutions, bypassing formally acknowledged routes of political action where they are scarcely represented. This particular kind of extra-institutional collective action is proposed in the thesis as an alternative to (which does not exclude) contested, male-oriented and unequal institutional politics. This thesis suggests that the *polis* is made of relational spaces that cut across both physical and institutional space. It also claims that women's collective action and political practices represent a way to re-think and possibly re-invent the *polis*.

### 1.3 Thesis overview

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first section, entitled "The spatial politics of Milanese women's movement" comprises two chapters: it provides an institutional reading of Milanese feminism and frames the debate over the gendering of urban space in the context of the 1970s and contemporary Milan. This temporally differentiated framework defines the two different periods I am looking at in this work. Although the time between the two periods is acknowledged, the two time spans represent two ideal-typical periods in Milanese feminist politics, the first one coinciding with the initial upsurge of feminist theories and struggles, the second one representing the contemporary processes of feminist spatial politics in Milan. The methodological Chapter opens the second section, which consists of three empirical chapters informed by theories on politics of location, space appropriation, notions of topological space and everyday life politics as important to feminism in Milan. The second section, entitled "Geography of women's collective action in Milan" is the core of the thesis where I make use of material gathered during my fieldwork in Milan. Here, I give an account of ongoing transformations in Milanese feminism which range from feminist political subjectivity to an analysis of the territorial and trans-territorial dimensions of Milanese women's political action.

More specifically, in Part 1, Chapter 2 looks at the politics of feminist space between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. Here, a gendered reading of Milanese women's struggles is outlined in a way that highlights both the contemporary debates about gendering the urban and the existing interconnections between Italian-based collective action and the city as a
territorial entity. In the same section, the physical spaces that were firstly appropriated and granted a visibility to women as a collective actor in Milan are explored in the context of radical feminism. In the second part of Chapter 2, the feminist movement in Milan is defined as an anti-institutional political actor that, however complex and articulated, has a number of key objectives including the initial refusal of institutional politics which were seen to mirror male power. Both the theory of sexual difference and separatism are terms used in Western feminism. Chapter 2 shows how they are interwoven and elaborated in a specific way by Milanese feminism which offers a unique take on them by linking difference and separatism to specific spatial practices leading to anti-institutional politics.

In Chapter 3, in Part 1, it is made clear how the oppositional character of Milanese feminism has gradually changed over time. In fact, not only did political practices deploying spatial practices such as separatism gradually transform and become institutionally accepted, but also the socio-political condition of Milanese women changed as they became increasingly integrated in the labour market and education. The spatial dimension of these socio-political transformations concerns the former sharp division between private and public for Italian women. In this Chapter, I argue that by gaining paid work and education, Milanese women did not necessarily enfranchise themselves from an exclusively domestic role, but they reached a position where they combined both domestic and (mainly) service-oriented work. In this changing political scenario, the emergent women’s organizations become increasingly unbounded, as their activity incorporates diverse spaces and heterogeneous forms of political action which open up toward collaboration with institutions from an extra-institutional position.

Chapter 4 introduces Part 2 and provides the methodological guidelines to read the second part of the thesis. The Chapter addresses the importance of negotiating the field reflexively, as has been emphasised by scholarship in both ethnography and feminist geography. The role of the researcher as an active part of the research process is seen as a way of challenging the notion of objective science, which, as with academic research, is never neutral. Rather, the positioning of the researcher is analysed in terms of playing an active part in shaping the results. The Chapter also underlines the difference between methods and methodology. Methods are the ways in which a researcher decides to answer research questions, which in my case were semi-structured interviews, observant participation and archival information gathered while on fieldwork in Milan. Methodology concerns the choices
involved in how to use and analyze the data, and the complex decisions taken when working with translations, clashing temporalities and spatial maps. The epistemological approach of the present thesis has followed a mix of methods which largely relied on personal relations with activists and stakeholders in organizations.

Chapter 5 offers a mapping of the ways in which feminist subjectivities evolved over time in Milan. This Chapter helps situate the political positions of the protagonists of the Milanese feminist movement through a narrative approach. Narrative is both a method I use in Chapter 5 and a fundamental tool that has been used since early feminist consciousness-raising practices to explore emerging political subjectivities. The Chapter shows that the body is the initial spatial frame to be exposed in the relational space of political meetings and it became the starting point in theorizing the politics of location, central to feminist theory. The narratives originating from individual politics of location which emerged during the interviews helped me identify the changing trajectories of the shifts from the personal to the political, from individual to collective action, and the ways in which both separatism and ideas about sexual difference are specifically situated in the geography of Milanese feminism.

Chapter 6 mirrors Chapter 2 as it deals with the degrees of boundedness of feminist spaces in Milan. This Chapter addresses the appropriation of city spaces from a Lefebvrian perspective and draws on the importance of the geographical concept of borders to define the boundedness or unboundedness of urban space from a feminist point of view. It also describes, in spatially specific terms, what it has meant for Milanese women to enter institutional life from the invisibility of the domestic sphere and discusses the hybrid nature of the first appropriated feminist sites. The Chapter focuses on the tangible aspects of Milan's urban space. The case studies show how the political practices of three contemporary women's organizations are intrinsically connected to the spatial aspects of the centres themselves.

Chapter 7 similarly mirrors Chapter 3. It draws on the women's centres degree of boundedness to the urban territory while deploying the notion of governance to understand the current institutional shift. Spatial politics in Milanese feminism in the 1980s moved from an anti-institutional domain to a more institutionalized one, although they were never fully institutional as evidenced from the administrative status of women's organizations. The actual governance policies, consisting in a decentralization of state power and a loss of acknowledged ways of political action and decision-making, provide an opportunity for women's collective action to
mobilize in a way that has the potential to obviate their lack of political representation in Italian institutional politics. As the case studies demonstrate, women's organizations in Milan invent new ways of inhabiting the **polis** without necessarily claiming a right to institutions.

The thesis aims to show that women's collective action and practices, which are relatively new on the political scene, have the potential to inscribe their role in Milan in a way which is innovative in comparison with the acknowledged modes of political representation. Beyond the legacy of feminism in terms of political practices, contemporary women's organizations show that political citizenship can also be achieved by challenging existing power structures from a position which is external to state institutions. By doing so, women's organizations demonstrate the potential to offer fruitful and project-specific forms of mobilization outside the space of traditional institutions⁴.

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⁴ This statement is not meant to undermine the fundamental work on equal opportunity which encourages Italian women to participate more actively in political institutions. Rather, it refers to the potential of women's organizations to create alternative forms of political action that foster women's participation in active citizenship in an environment that is extra-institutional and therefore more open to social change. From this angle it would be possible to ultimately produce a transformation able to influence state institutions.
PART 1. The spatial politics of Milanese women's movement

Part 1 provides the socio-historical context of the development of feminist politics and practices in Milan. This part will compare two periods, the late 1960s-1980s, when the first appropriation of feminist publics took place in Milan, and the 1980s onwards, when ways of organizing and conceiving of women oriented collective action radically changed. This part also provides a framework to think about Milanese feminism from a spatial perspective setting up the complexities involved in feminist spatial politics defined, initially, by the theory of sexual difference.

One of the hypotheses guiding this work concerns the degree of boundedness of appropriated feminist spaces in Milan. Separatism as an anti-institutional practice will be defined here. The shift from feminism to a more diffused form of feminist politics, which happened from the 1980s onwards, will be illustrated by providing analytic accounts about Milanese women's changes in social status (increased education levels and employment). This argument will be used to show how Milanese women accessed the public sphere while still carrying the burden of private commitments, when they individually took up professions in non-separatist contexts. The new kind of spatial politics they generated when their public presence increased, such as institutional separatism and the creation of women's organizations as agents of governance practices, contributed increasingly to the definition of new feminist spatial politics as increasingly unbounded.

In other words, Part 1, by giving a spatial reading of Milanese women’s struggle (Chapter 2) and of Milanese women’s organizations (Chapter 3), will highlight the existing tensions between collective action and individual achievements, between separatism as an anti-institutional practice and its institutionalization, between the materiality of the firstly appropriated spaces of Milanese radical feminism and the increasing need to understand Milan as borderless, where the networked action of women’s organizations contributes to configure them as unbounded spaces. Understanding feminist spatial politics in Milan also involves
addressing the differences between the feminist movement as an anti-institutional actor during the 1970s and women's organizations as an extra-institutional actor from the 1980s onwards.
Chapter 2. The politics of feminist space: theory and practices (late 1960s-mid 1980s)

My research shows that from the 1960s, attempts by Italian feminists to inscribe women's changing identity in cities is strongly connected to the spaces that they carved out in Milan's urban geography. Women's movements in most Western countries from the late 1960s until the 1980s appropriated separate spaces in the city and the oppositional nature of these spaces played an important role in the definition of their changing identities. Italian feminism is represented by separatism, the theory of sexual difference common to French feminism, and the emphasis on relational practices among women. As will become clear through the theory of sexual difference, a distinctive feature of Italian radical feminism is the rejection of emancipation as a possible route towards women's liberation. Only through the acknowledgement of existing differences among women and by the creation of a feminine alternative to masculine "symbolic mediation" in language is possible to subvert the unequal power relation between the sexes. In this context, separate spaces became the key factor allowing this process to take place.

This Chapter deals with both the spatial and the institutional aspects of space appropriation by the Milanese feminist movement. Firstly, it will provide an overview of Milan's post-war urban development and will draw on the ways in which social movements of the 1970s mobilized, establishing a link between collective action and the city. It will then address the ways in which feminist spaces are embedded in the Milanese territory and highlight the specificities of the Italian approach to feminist theory. As I will show in this Chapter, separatist practices in Italy have a different theoretical background when compared to other forms of feminist separatism which developed concurrently in the USA, the UK and Western Europe (with the exception of France). In the second part of the Chapter, I will outline the anti-

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5 According to the theory of sexual difference, women are not mediated or represented symbolically in language, and therefore, it is necessary to create the missing symbolic mediation in order to adequately represent them.
institutional character of the first feminist urban spaces in Milan (Bono and Kemp 1991). Due to the specificity of sexual difference, separatist spaces were meant to re-create the missing "symbolic mediation" able to represent women in language through an exclusive relationality.

In line with global women's movements, whose common denominator is that "these actors tend to be invisible through the conventional state-centric lens on world politics" (Peterson and Sisson Runyan 2005: 226), the Italian feminist movement in Milan also posed a challenge to prevailing gender ideologies by mainly organizing itself outside state structures. From this invisibility, the opposition of global feminist movements to oppressive state structures and policies are defined as *anti-state actors* by Peterson and Sisson Runyan (2005). In contrast, as transnational networks, other women's movements worldwide cut across state boundaries (such as global environmental groups) and are defined as *non-state actors* (Peterson and Sisson Runyan 2005). *Anti-state actors* and *non-state actors* are appropriate terms to describe two different phases of the Milanese feminist movement: the first, occurring in the 1970s, assumed the features of an anti-state actor, while today, it is more akin to the characteristics of a non-state actor. In my work, these terms are also referred to as *anti-institutional* and *non (or extra)-institutional*, representing one of the main interpretative frameworks proposed throughout the thesis. Although it is not the purpose of this work to focus on existing similarities and differences between Italian and other national or transnational feminist movements, the framework proposed by Peterson and Ryan (2005) is useful when analyzing Milanese feminism.

In this Chapter, Nancy Fraser's (1990) definition of "counter public" will serve as a theoretical tool to outline the oppositional and anti-institutional nature of Milanese feminist spaces from the late 1960s to the 1980s. From the late 1960s, feminist groups in Milan organized themselves outside institutional structures: they met in private houses and created spaces in the city with the aim of challenging the prevailing male-oriented gender ideologies. Counter publics therefore became not just the more visible and publicly exposed feminist spaces, but are also private spaces or houses made available by activists for public meetings.

In the next section, I will demonstrate how the gender issue is intertwined with the geography of urbanizing Milan during the 1960s. The socio-geographical context I provide is useful in order to understand the role that the spatial organization of Milan played in the feminist movement's policies about space.
2.1 A spatial reading of Milanese women’s struggle

In the context of this research, a spatial reading of Milan’s social movements in the 1970s builds on the work of feminist scholars seeking to re-conceptualise urban space from a gendered perspective. It also offers useful tools to understand Italy’s, and in particular Milan’s, existing links between social movements and urban territory. This kind of debate challenged traditional public/private dichotomies and the ways in which these reinforced women’s domestic role. It also offers ways in which to understand the traditionally controversial position of women in cities (Behhabib 1998; Bridge and Watson 2002; Dörhöfer 1980, 1990; Dörhöfer and Terlinden 1988; Frank 2003; Fraser 1990; Hayden 1981; Landes 1998; Massey 1994; McDowell 1983; McDowell and Sharp 1997; Moller Okin 1998; Paravicini 2003; Pateman 1988; Rodenstein 1994; Rose 1993; Spain 1992; Terlinden 1980, 2003; Watson 2002; Wilson 2001; Young 1990). In particular, German authors Brueckner and Meyer (2003) and Doderer (2003) deal explicitly with the importance of strategies elaborated by feminist activists to appropriate social spaces and define themselves.

In the Italian context, the existing literature on the strategies feminists devised to appropriate specific city spaces and the role of space in the definition of feminist identities is fragmented, and requires a chronological summary. In order to understand Milan’s feminist action in its specific spatial context, it is important to acknowledge that social movements, like all other social relations, are geographically constituted (Miller 2000), particularly when considering separatist spaces for feminist politics. Initially, the opening of separate city spaces by Milanese radical feminists allowed for the creation of a collective identity, and it was considered more important and more subversive to appropriate these new public spaces than to take part in demonstrations or institutional political struggles. Feminist separatist groups were thought to represent a new kind of space with no distinction between personal (private) and political (public). It was also believed that these spaces allowed for “a collective transformation of reality” (Libreria delle Donne di Milano, 1987: 94).

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6 In 1976, an action-oriented practice in Milan initiated a new wave of opening autonomous spaces. Radical feminists wanted to gain separate city spaces and therefore inaugurated a spatial strategy called *la pratica del fare* [the action practice]. The immediate effect of *la pratica del fare* was the creation of women-only bookshops, libraries, shelters and cafes (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987).
One of the most influential theoretical starting points for addressing the oppression experienced by Western women living in urban environments was Betty Friedan's 1963 *Feminine Mystique*, which concerned suburbanisation in American cities. This and other early feminist writings (De Beauvoir [1949] 1972, Mitchell 1974, Rowbotham 1969, 1973) inspired Western European women's movements to enter public spaces by openly criticizing spatial hierarchies in the city, and encouraging political action towards the appropriation of new urban spaces. From the late 1960s, the factors that contributed to the political opportunity for women's mobilizations in Milan included local women's groups' activities, their links with the traditional left and the "double militancy" activists' institutional connections. This political structure enabled Milanese women to mobilize resources and, over time, spatially inscribe their presence in Milan. A good example of this process is the creation of women-oriented health services such as family shelters (*consultori familiari*).

As I will show in the next section, space matters for the politics of Milan feminism because state politics in Italy have reinforced the stereotypical female's segregation within the domestic sphere, as is evidenced in Milan's post-war urban development policies.

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7 "Double militancy": simultaneous participation/involvement in the feminist movement and in the activities of an organized party or political group (Bono and Kemp 1991).

8 Whilst from the late 1960s women's mobilization in the US and in Western Europe developed strands of liberal, Marxist and radical feminism, only radical and Marxist strands were evident in 1970s/1980s Italian feminism (Vacchelli 2005). The workers and students' movement uprising in early 1970s Milan provided the external political opportunity for the timely mobilization of feminist resources.
2.1.1 Gendering Milan’s post-war urban development

Gender differences in the accessibility of urban spaces first emerged in the context of suburbanisation. While suburb is a term that better suits the US and, to an extent, the British urbanisation processes, in Italy, it is more appropriate to refer to this phenomenon as a “diffused city” or the “periphery” (Martinotti 1993). Periphery is the term that best describes the non-central areas of the city as their extension outside the city core evolves over time. Areas that at the end of the 1950s were peripheral no longer are today, particularly following the 1960s internal migration wave which required a substantial reorganization of residential neighbourhoods.

In post-war Italy, housing policies in metropolitan areas had an impact not only on the built environment but also on women’s domestic exclusion; an exclusion already fostered by the fascist regime which limited women’s access to education and reinforced their role within the family, emphasizing active citizenship and fascist pride (Meldini 1975). Urban policies were implemented to create desirable peripheral areas to contrast with the rapid and dysfunctional urbanisation process in the main industrial cities of the country, consisting of the northern trade
triangle of Milan, Turin and Genoa. The underlying philosophy of the INA Casa urban policies\(^9\), for instance, was to promote a traditional role for women within the household while keeping them segregated in the family-oriented community of the borgo. These policies preserved rural and conservative values as opposed to those of a rapidly changing society (Sarti 1995).

In Milan, after the 1960s, a disorganised mass housing project created large dysfunctional areas outside industrial cities, the so-called quartieri dormitorio (dormitory neighbourhoods), which lacked essential services and infrastructure, and where social conflicts were prevalent. The transition from community life in Milan's peripheral areas (where people used to both live and work) to overcrowded and poor areas lacking fundamental services became evident in the cases of Baggio, Barona and Bovisa, and later in the Comasina area (Foot 2001).

\(^9\) INA Casa was a post-war public housing project to increment workers occupation. It lasted from 1949 to 1963 (Sarti 1995).
Bovisa, for instance, was a typical working-class neighbourhood characterised by manufacturing industrial production. Contrary to other major Milanese working-class neighbourhoods, Bovisa lacked adequate social housing and services: there were no chemists, schools or markets. Because of these deprived circumstances, Milan's peripheries have been referred to as ghettos for housewives, the elderly, the young, and the unemployed (Foot 2001).

Conservative urban policies and a geographical division between the workplace and residential quarters had the effect of increasing women's domestic segregation in Milan, and in every other urban area in northern Italy involved in the so-called "second industrialisation". In Milan's deprived post-war scenario, low employment and biased welfare policies also contributed to instability within the Italian population and in particular among women. Even though statistical data showed an increase in the female employment rate towards the end of the 1970s, in 1977, the employed female population in Italy only made up 37% of the overall active female population\(^{10}\), confirming that the Italian female participation in the labour market was poor. Moreover, it was the lowest in Europe at that time (Balbo and Bianchi 1982, Del Boca 2002).

Welfare state interventions were devised to mediate the imminent rise of social conflicts by protecting the family as a "natural society" within the Italian state (Art.26 of the Italian Constitution). In Italy, the family became a privileged beneficiary of social policies, which intervened in fields such as reproduction and the satisfaction of citizens' needs (Saraceno 1998). By doing this, an attempt was made to change working women's identity. Categories of welfare intervention ranged from health services, education and the establishment of a minimum wage to provide assistance in reproductive roles, such as the care of the young and the elderly. The state became a privileged interlocutor for families in the rising society of services, favouring women's employment in the tertiary sector and at the same time institutionalising their "double commitment" within and outside the household\(^{11}\).

Women's identity and their complex relation to city life were theorised in the 1990s by the Vanda group at the Architecture Faculty of Milan. Groups of women in Milan sought to

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\(^{10}\) By active female population is meant the sum of employed and employable females in age for work, between 15 and 64.

\(^{11}\) Laura Balbo (1978) introduces the concept of women’s "double commitment" in Doppia Presenza, Inchiesta, vol.32, pg 3-9. The process leading to women's "double commitment" or "double presence" is explained in Chapter 3, section 3.1.1, "From private to public. The accumulation of domestic and service work".
challenge the imposed norms concerning traditional sex roles and experimented with ways of subverting the private/public space dichotomy. However, the specific issue of women’s marginalization was not explicitly raised in the political discourse of the time. Despite fragmented attempts (like those of the Vanda group) and in contrast to northern European countries, the UK and the US, Italy lacked a systematic elaboration of urban theories addressing the specific ways in which the mutual constitution of space and power has been detrimental for Italian women. Rather, the feminist debate on urban space was embedded in the practices of political mobilisations towards the use of space, and was not explicitly addressed in academic debates or by mass media.

On the other hand, forms of urban activism were directed at redefining the unbalanced relation among women, place and power through a criticism of the pronounced gender division in the private sphere, both within the family and in personal relationships. In Milan, this approach developed through different strategies of urban activism: the first, reflecting an engagement in institutional policies, was characterized by street demonstrations, organised action and involvement in organisations and political parties. The second led to an informal separatismo in enclosed, women-only spaces. Separatism as a political practice will be addressed in section 2.2.3 of this Chapter.

As I have suggested, the gender-based segregation issues that emerged in post-war Milan represent a possible way to look at the mutual constitution of space and gender. A complementary approach to this understanding can be found in the theories which explain the rootedness of the 1968 Italian social movement in urban territory. The type of spatial reading which I will propose is helpful for understanding the importance of exercising control over urban space for the 1968 movement’s self-determination. This approach sheds light on Milanese feminism’s first demonstrations which took place during the general uprising of the 1968 Italian students’ and workers’ movement. The next section provides the theoretical background for an analysis of the feminist movement’s action towards the appropriation of urban spaces in Milan.
2.1.2 Territoriality in movement: collective action and the city

In the introduction to a work on collective movements in 1970s Italy, Donatella Della Porta (1996) argues that, as in other Western democracies, new social actors emerged in order to shape and address the specific political needs of the time. New social movement theories are rooted in continental Europe's traditional social theory and political philosophy (Buechler 1995). Manuel Castells (1977, 1978, 1983), among others (Touraine 1992; Habermas 1984, 1990; Melucci 1989; Offe 1985), provides important theoretical tools to illustrate the interrelations between social movements and the socio-spatial dynamics of revolt taking place in European urban contexts. Collective action mobilizations in Western Europe were distinctive and diffuse in the late 1960s and 1970s. As Alberto Melucci (1996) argues, "government instability, innovative dynamism and recurrent economic recession, creative cultural life and terrorism, conservative elites and traditionally the strongest communist party in West" (259) are among the main distinctive features of the Italian context. Social conflicts in Italy assumed deep political implications by undermining the institutional basis of the country (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, Ginsborg 1989).

The city has often been studied as a theatre for collective action (Castells 1983, Martin and Moroni 2007, Melucci 1996, Ruggiero 2000). Manuel Castells (1983) looks at the city as a social product resulting from conflicting social interests and values. From this angle, urban issues in Milan became central because of the state's attempt to fill in the gap between an urban-industrial society geared towards mass consumption and the archaism of political, educational, social and religious institutions (Melucci 1996). In other words, emerging social movements in Milan sought state infrastructures while re-affirming their identities to counter a growing sense of homogenisation induced by mass production and consumption.

Another aspect of Castells' urban theory that can be applied to the protests taking place in 1970s Milan is the movement's demand for a decentralised government, aimed at achieving self-management and autonomous, territorial based decision-making. The objective of the newly developed movimento was to gain access to decision-making processes, and, in order to achieve this, new de-centred autonomous neighbourhood committees were established. In this context, overlapping factors such as improved access to the labour market
and to education played an important role in the emerging feminist movement's action toward the appropriation and self-management of women-specific urban spaces in the city.

The Italian feminist movement affirmed its ideological distance from all formally constituted parties which were considered suspicious because they were seen to embody male authority. Many of the women involved in this newly emerged feminist movement had taken part in the 1968 uprising "with its strong anti-institutional bias, and were often members of extra parliamentary groups (Lotta Contiuna, Avanguardia Operaia, Potere Operaio, Prima Linea, Democrazia Proletaria and so on) which criticized the traditional left" (Bono and Kemp 1991:10). However, leftist groups were unable to understand women's new consciousness achieved through participating in self-reflexion groups, and were hostile to their determination to gain self-expression12. This generated internal conflicts within the 1968 social movement and the need by feminists to differentiate themselves from others by appropriating separate spaces in the city.

In Milan, the feminist movement was characterised by the presence of many groups trying to create local and national networks, yet often disagreeing on political agendas and on ways in which to generate political action. Despite its internal strife, the leitmotiv of Italian feminism is its non-institutional foundation, and the importance of an active, collectively led mobilisation of resources for its political action (Bono and Kemp 1991). In Milan, feminists asserted their identity by appropriating autonomous and territorial separatist spaces in the city.

2.1.3 Milanese feminist groups’ spatial and political practices: a chronology

The strategies of the feminist appropriation of urban spaces in Milan evolved according to the diverse phases of the movement, as Anna Rita Calabro’ and Laura Grasso (2004) argue in their survey on feminist groups in Milan. The table below shows that the early transformations of the political practices of Milanese radical feminism are embedded in the historical context of the late 1960s-early 1980s Italy. The table is organized in “Phase”, “Group” and “Political practice/Policy” and situates the emerging groups and feminist collectives in Milan in specific

12 This happened through the disruption of marches and the interruption of feminist meetings by the "comrades", which had the effect of enticing women to leave these organizations and join feminist politics.
time spans. As will be evident from the table, according to the political circumstances of the time, the emerging feminist groups in Milan engaged with and enacted different spatial practices and policies. While this section provides a chronological account of the first appropriated feminist spaces in Milan, Chapter 6 draws on the political meaning of space appropriation and provides a geographical reading of these spaces in Milan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Political practice/Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965-1970</td>
<td>-Demau</td>
<td>Separatism/critique of emancipation feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-MLD movimento di liberazione della donna</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1970-1974</td>
<td>-Rivolta Femminile</td>
<td>Separatism/consciousness-raising practices and self-help imported from the USA/</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Anabasi</td>
<td>transformation of personal biographies into collective resources/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Asilo autogestito</td>
<td>creation of archives/positioning of the groups within or outside the extra-parliamentary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Cherubini</td>
<td>left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Collettivo Milanese per la liberazione femminile</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Lotta Femminista</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Collettivo San Gottardo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Collettivo via Albenga</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Gruppo femminista per una medicina delle donne</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Gruppo pratica dell'Inconscio</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1975-1976</td>
<td>-Col di Lana</td>
<td>Separatism/ Pratica del fare (political practice oriented to appropriating physical space in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Mancinelli</td>
<td>the city) /Pratica dell’Inconscio (political practice aiming at exploring sexuality and the role</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Libreria delle Donne</td>
<td>of the female body in psychoanalytic terms) /strong anti-institutional views of radical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Collettivo Eni</td>
<td>feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Feminist Groups and Activities</td>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-1979</td>
<td>- Coordinamento Femminista di Via dell’ Orso</td>
<td>Engagement with topics related to political violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Gruppo scrittura</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Collettivo della Borletti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1979</td>
<td>Casa di via Lanzone</td>
<td>“Dynamic separatism”\textsuperscript{13}/Intense publishing activity: Lapis, Grattacielo, Fluttuaria/Consolidation of differenza theory and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Cooperativa Gervasia Broxon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Ristorante Cicip&amp;Ciciap</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Gruppo Phoenix</td>
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</tbody>
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\textit{Table 2.1 List of feminist groups and activities in 1970s Milan according to Calabro’ and Grasso (2004)}

Between 1965 and 1970, for the first time in contemporary Italy, sexuality became a publicly debated issue and the peculiarities of a non-emancipation oriented feminist movement (whose characteristics will be explained in section 2.2.2) began to emerge. At that time, early theoretic formulations of Milanese feminism were still strictly connected to the emerging left. Indeed, in 1965, Demau (the acronym stands for De-mystification of Authoritarism), the first feminist group in Milan, lost many of its initial members to the revolt led by students and workers. Within Demau, however, this situation led to the emergence of new feminist concepts and the politics of separate spaces.

\textsuperscript{13} Dynamic separatism will be explained in section 3.2.1.
Between 1970 and 1974, consciousness-raising practices were imported to Italy from the USA. The Italian variant, the autocoscienza practice, confronted Milan's women with their peripheral role in the public sphere. Until that moment, women's lives were individual narratives, but, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, Milanese groups such as Rivolta Femminile and Anabasi transformed individual narratives into collective resources accessible to other women. The early 1970s were significant because, following a meeting at the Umanitaria building in 1971, two separate strands of Milanese feminism became evident: groups like Anabasi, Rivolta Femminile and Demau wanted to follow a more discreet and introspective way to women's liberation, while Collettivo Milanese per la Liberazione Femminile preferred to integrate Marxism and issues of women's economic exploitation into feminist discourse. The latter group's aim was more action-oriented, in the hopes of building support networks within Milanese factories with a high ratio of female employees, such as Siemens and Farmitalia (Calabro' and Grasso 2004).
In 1976, the stance taken by the Cherubini group towards an abortion rights protest demonstrated an open refusal to become involved in institutional politics\textsuperscript{14}. For this group, a drastic rethinking of sexuality and power relations between the sexes was necessary before engaging with abortion rights. This position influenced the group's strategy towards the use of urban space: while taking part in the demonstration would have allowed them visibility in public spaces, their choice to abstain from the protest represented their refusal to be involved in the public and political arena ruled by patriarchal power - which was Cherubini's main objective. Paradoxically, however, the effect of establishing women's places has been to make them visible and further highlight their presence, in the urban territory and in patriarchal society.

Between 1977 and 1979, the 1968 social movement undertook an increasingly armed struggle and, at the same time, due to increased police repression following terrorist activities, collective action came to an impasse (Ginsborg 1989, Melucci 1996, Pozzi 2007). This became evident following the kidnapping and murder of Christian Democrat party leader Aldo Moro by the terrorist group Brigate Rosse, which generated a wave of police brutality, surveillance and crackdown towards independent protests in Milan and elsewhere in Italy. Many women's autonomous spaces were closed down or restricted in number, especially those identified with anti-institutional political movements. In this period, the Coordinamento Femminista di Via dell' Orso engaged with topics regarding women and political violence. The restriction of anti-institutional political spaces in the city, however, increased violence. Yet after 1979, feminist action flourished, with the opening of Casa di Via Lanzone and Libreria delle Donne in via Dogana. These collectives published extensively including journals, such as \textit{Quotidiano Donna} and \textit{Grattacielo}. This stage of Milanese feminism, anticipating the 1980s, suggested that the time of introspection and exploration of the self had largely been left behind. The need for opening up spaces in the city focused on action, rather than just theory, and set the stage for a more pragmatic political practice (Calabro' and Grasso 2004).

The activity of Milan's feminist groups was designed to create women's houses as open, autonomous spaces from which women could enter as political subjects into what was then assumed as male-dominated cultural areas such as health, cultural production and sexuality. Indeed, the intrinsic oppositional character of these newly appropriated spaces will be the focus of the next section.

\textsuperscript{14} In April 1976, an open letter from Cherubini was addressed to the national newspaper \textit{Corriere della Sera}. 38
2.2 Milan’s feminist movement as anti-institutional actor

This section provides the theoretical background of the feminist spaces appropriated in the 1970s described as anti-institutional. After drawing on Nancy Fraser’s definition of “counter public” (1990), it delineates the different strands within the Milanese feminist movement by highlighting their distance from institutional politics. In addition, the theory of sexual difference and separatism are presented in their necessary opposition to the male-centred public sphere.

In 1970s Italy, abortion and divorce were illegal and the existing penal law did not regulate rape. The Vatican’s censorship around female sexuality was a negative force affecting the ways in which, for instance, complications arising from pregnancy were addressed by the existing health care system. This is a key issue as it constitutes the basis for the development of women-oriented health care services such as consultori familiari [family shelters]. In Italy, sexism in health care related environments was intimately connected to the difficulty in dealing with the specificities of the female body and in addressing abortion rights in an ethical fashion. Indeed, as I will show in Chapter 5, abortion remains a contentious issue in recent political struggles around women’s self-determination with respect to reproductive rights. The critique of the sexist Italian health system was first articulated within the self-help separatist groups opposed to the centrally provided, male-oriented health system (Duden 1998, 2004; Poidimani 1997).

Feminist struggles in Milan aimed to build alternative primary and secondary social services and were intended to overcome Italian women’s enduring condition of domestic isolation and their discursive exclusion from patriarchal institutions and the jurisdictional system. New services, infrastructures and cultural centres introduced in Italy by feminist movements, were areas of political action aimed at defining women’s identity outside the family. The tasks assigned to the family by welfare arrangements (domestic work, reproduction and care related work, and home administration responsibilities) overlapped with women’s unpaid and unrecognised roles within the family nucleus. Thus, feminists criticized the conservative logics of welfare policies according to which the organization of public services in 1970s Milan expected citizens’ needs to be met through private and domestic support networks.
Given the minimal implementation of social policies, the state could only provide some of the basic services such as health and education to support a functioning production/consumption lifestyle. As Luciana Percovich (2005) illustrated in *La coscienza nel corpo* [The conscience in the body], Milanese feminists' attempt at accessing new social services represented a negotiation with the central state, as shown by the political struggle for family shelters. Although it would appear that the establishment of family-oriented social services were complementary to and therefore in support of the limited level of centralized service provision, the ideas behind the struggle were anti-institutional.

The anti-institutional activity of feminist groups, as well as the oppositional nature of the spaces of separatism in 1970s Italy, clearly resonates with the work of Nancy Fraser (1990). Fraser provides a useful definition of oppositional spaces as "subaltern counter publics":

> parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their activities, interests and needs (Fraser, 1990:67).

In the above definition, it is clear how different aspects of the appropriation of urban space are intertwined in the history of women's struggles. The term "parallel discursive arenas" used by Fraser usefully defines women's separatist spaces from the late 1960s and the "counter discourses" which formulated "oppositional interpretations of their needs" as a necessary step for them to become visible in the city and in wider public arenas.

Radical feminists in Milan promoted the establishment of separatist spaces such as women's centres, bookshops, cafes and collectives, and also meeting spaces in private houses.

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15 Contrary to radical and separatist parts of the movement, neo-Marxist feminists have been keener to engage in institutional policies. The UDI (Unione Donne Italiane, a post-war feminist organisation brought together on emancipatonist and anti-fascist purposes), the MLD (Movimento di Liberazione della Donna, a women's association similar to the Italian Radical Party) and other organisations such as the Italian Communist Party led important fights to regulate divorce (1970), equality (1977), abortion (1978) and the proposed law – led by popular initiative – on sexual violence (1977) finally approved by Italian parliament in 1996 (Bono and Kemp 1991).
which aimed at circulating counter discourses. Other Milanese feminists, the so-called "comrade feminists" or those of the "double militancy", created women-oriented family shelters initiating a culture of anti-patriarchal services and social infrastructures. The ways in which the existing distinctions blur and merge in the making of women-only centres and organizations in Milan will be illustrated in the next Chapter. Here I set up the strands of Milanese feminism in order to focus on the theories that generated separatism and the political practices related to sexual difference.

2.2.1 The different strands of Milanese women's movement

In this section, different kinds of feminist groups, including their positions and political strategies, are defined according to their distance from institutions and their proximity to the rest of the movement. Different strands in Italian feminism coexisted in the geography of Milanese feminist politics: the radical engagement with theoretical and psychoanalytic questions, Marxists addressing the problematic position of working women caught between production and reproduction, and other groups fighting for local social services. Until the mid-1970s, feminist groups in Milan pursued two different strategies of political action: the reflection groups and the social practice groups. The so-called "reflection groups" (gruppi di riflessione) adopted consciousness-raising practices, a process directed towards a conscious awareness of the self (Martucci 2008) as a starting point for their theoretical and psychoanalytical approach to feminism (as will be clarified in Chapter 5). Reflection groups tended to mainly welcome intellectual and bourgeois women. Instead, "social practice groups" (gruppi di pratica del sociale) argued that a change in one's personal life directly impacted on structural changes within economic, political and social institutions. As this required a higher level of political mobilization, they were more inclusive than reflection groups, principally composed of working class individuals focussed on collective action. Reflection groups were often strictly separatist and were easily identifiable with the so-called "double militancy". Double militants comprised of women who were simultaneously involved in the feminist movement and in the activities of an
organized party or extra-parliamentary political group, as explained above (Bertilotti and Scattigno 1995, Boccia 2002, Del Bo Boffino 1996).

Feminist groups listed above were female-only groups meeting in private and domestic spaces where women lived. Alternatively, activists would meet in common spaces or in workplaces (such as the Siemens collective) to reflect on their oppressed condition and organise political mobilisations. In these spaces, most often only accessible to women, discussions revolved around finding agreement on fundamental human rights and establishing shared positions about their role in the family, in politics and at work. The aim of this political practice, consisting in the appropriation of women-specific urban spaces, was said to be the development of relationships among women, which in the past had been mostly experienced within households. According to the activists of the Libreria delle Donne di Milano (1987), the counter-cultural spaces created by feminists had the potential to create the separateness needed to produce exclusive relations among women. This specific way of experiencing social relations among women was considered to be subversive. Separate spaces became a means of exploring the implications of women’s specific “relationality” [lo stare tra donne]. Initially, the ongoing political commitment among women excluded potential collaborations with institutions because they were thought to mirror patriarchal power. Women’s separatist places allowed for a redefinition of their identity, not by comparing themselves to men, but by acknowledging sexual difference through isolation as a first step before equality could be conceived.
Come ogni altro negozio, dà sulla strada e chiunque può entrarvi. È stata realizzata perché le donne po' siano servirsi di esso. A quelle che entrano non è chiesto di presentarsi o di dichiararsi in alcun modo. Abbiamo voluto aprire un luogo che è politico per la semplice ragione che in esso le donne possono incontrarsi senza rinchiudersi nel privato e senza dover subordinare i propri interessi a quelli di istituzioni ed organizzazioni. Un luogo dove possono mettersi in gioco liberamente e senza transgressioni dall'isolamento della vita di ogni giorno. Lo stare tra donne, l'esperienza vicina e perso na di contatto, è infatti il punto di partenza della nostra pratica politica. Nella libreria si confr ontano libri scelti da donne. Si raccolgono e si distribuiscono materiali ed informazioni che interessano le donne e la loro lotta politica. Si vogliono incontrare e si pensa a come provvedere a doman di.

Abbiamo voluto fare incontrare le donne in luoghi dove possono incontrarsi senza rinchiudersi nel privato e senza dover subordinare i propri interessi a quelli di istituzioni ed organizzazioni. Il corpo è caratterizzato naturalmente e porta le tracce di una produzione quotidiana e di una riproduzione della specie umana: in questa prima divisione del lavoro tra uomo e donna sta la causa delle censure che bloccano o deformano le donne nella sessualità, nel pensiero, nella parola, nella scrittura. Dedicandosi all'attività letteraria e artistica con una parte forse inevitabile di competizione verso il mondo macchiato di gerarchie, poche donne si sono prese, nell'uso del tempo, del pensiero e del corpo, una libertà che veniva giudicata scandalosa e che noi vogliamo valorizzare attraverso la libreria.

Figure 2.4 Flyer advertising the opening of the Milan Bookstore Collective [Libreria delle Donne]. 1975. Source: Baeri and Buttafuoco (1997)

Sympathetic to feminist ideas but outside the feminist movement, women’s collectives (collettivi femminili) adopted strategies to further women’s worker rights. The collectives were created within the workplace and, though autonomous, were open to negotiations with trade unions. They were heterogeneous groups that successfully achieved a strong bond between extra-parliamentary politics and Milan’s territory through area committees16. Area committees in Milan and women’s collectives within workplaces were spontaneous responses to the general insurgence in major Italian cities during the 1970s. Women’s collectives included workers, housewives and employees. They did not necessarily belong to the feminist movement, as their political strategies originated within the 1968 movement; however, they adopted the feminist inspired methodology of starting from personal experience to influence the political (Calabrò and Grasso 2004).

16 A good example of such a group in Milan is the Collettivo Ticinese. Area committees worked in tandem with the areas of Milan in which they were located, and dealt with housing as well as broader neighbourhood issues.
Because of the geographical complexity of Milan’s 1970s feminist movement, it is difficult to distinguish the feminist from the women’s movement. The nuances are tricky to define as their collective action is structured in a heterogeneous way. Marina Bianchi and Maria Mormino (1984) provide three characteristic features to define the women’s movement as (i) a movement consisting of different women’s aggregations whose main characteristic is the existence of groups with an identifiable nucleus and a place or continuity in time, (ii) self-definition of the groups as a part of the movement, (iii) existence of a network of relations among the Milanese groups. While feminists always belong to the women’s movement, women’s movement activists do not necessarily identify with feminism and the practices that mostly define the feminist movement such as separatism and autocoscienza. The feminist movement and the women’s movement were more likely to overlap in the 1970s, whereas today the two categories are more clearly set, as some members of the women’s movement do not identify with the feminist legacy. Notwithstanding such distinctions, of central importance to this thesis is the kind of spatial practices that feminist politics enact.

In Milan, as in other American and Western European cities, the appropriation women-only city spaces brought gender specific issues into the public arena. Feminist groups and women who created autonomous spaces had the important function of initiating the debate about their presence in public spaces: externally, they became visible in the contested urban territory, while internally they fostered the identity of women as political subjects (Boccia 2002). New developments in feminist thought and action sought to subvert the traditional role of women in Italian society so that previously non-political spaces such as domestic interiors and the private sphere took on a critical role as part of a wider public discourse. The collective action of the first feminist groups in Milan aimed at contrasting the male-oriented Italian system, and contributed to creating women-specific spaces in the city such as women-oriented health services, cafes, libraries, separatist feminist groups and collectives. Despite the divisions and the different strands within Italian feminism, the common thread is an anti-institutional view of political engagement and the sexual difference debate as a starting point for further developments in feminist theory and practices.
2.2.1 No equality without difference

A valuable and original contribution of Milanese feminism to national and international feminisms is the elaboration of the concept of sexual difference as a presupposition for political difference\(^{17}\) (Cavarero 1985; Foque 1999; Irigaray 1974, 1984, 1990; Libreria delle Donne 1998). In contrast to prevailing US and European emancipation-targeted feminism (with the exception of France), Italian feminism has been concerned with the articulation of the concept of differenza. The theoretical contribution of differenza has been the invention of a symbolic mediation among women through separatism (Diotima 1987). This implies rejecting the possibility offered by emancipation to join society as it stands, and initiating a drastic exploration of the self to avoid a "mutilated integration" (Dominijanni 1989) which involves an already unbalanced power relation in society, ranging from language to other patriarchal domains. A critique of emancipation feminism is already evident through early documents of the Milan feminist group Demau (1966), and Carla Lonzi’s (1970) Sputiamo su Hegel. The Manifesto of Rivolta Femminile reads: “Equality is an ideological attempt to subjugate women at a higher level” (3). Emancipation fosters social action modelled on the objectives and the means of men participating in social life as a right and as a duty of their own sex,

the relation between political practice and psychoanalytic practice is at the core of difference feminism and it sets a conceptual distance from emancipation feminism (Dominijanni 1995: 8).

Difference is an articulated and complex concept drawing on both the philosophy of language and psychoanalysis. Women are said to be excluded from language as it presupposes a neutral subject assumed to be male by post-structuralist and feminist theories (Irigaray 1974, Cavarero and Restaino 1987). Phallocentric language excludes women in a way that makes it impossible to mediate them symbolically; that is, to represent them in language as a subject. Rosi Braidotti (2002) calls this exclusion phallogenocentrism. For this reason, according

\(^{17}\) Nicoletta Poidimani (1997, 1998) criticizes the theory of sexual difference drawing on Milan’s activist Daniela Pellegrini’s early criticisms and writes an intellectual history of differenza theories. She discards the symbolic authority attributed to the figure of the mother by the Milan Libreria theorists, opposing desire to authority and indicating the material body as a starting point for feminist practices rather than the symbolic realm.
to differenza theorists, women have to invent a female-like symbolic mediation able to give an account of women as subjects in language. For instance, re-evaluating the relationship between mother and daughter (while classical psychoanalysis only addresses the mother and son relationship) would be a significant step to make this symbolic representation possible.

In particular, the work of Luce Irigaray (1974, 1984) played a fundamental role in the theoretical formulation of difference that helped shape Italian feminism. In turn, the work of the Milan Bookstore Collective contributed to Irigaray's work as she points out in *Je, Tu, Nous* (1990). Irigaray has enriched the Italian feminist debate with philosophical insights on psychoanalysis, psychology and linguistics, as is evident in her most famous works: *Speculum*, *L’autre femme* (1974) and *L’ethique de la différence sexuelle* (1984). The influence of French feminism on the Italian formulation of differenza was reinforced when, in 1972, Milan's feminist groups joined two international meetings organized by the French group “Psychanalyse et Politique”. These meetings initiated two pratica dell’inconscio [subconscious practice] groups, led in Milan by influential feminist scholars such as Lea Melandri and Lia Cigarini. From the group “Pratica dell’inconscio” came the journal *Lapis* and the Milan Libera Universita' delle Donne (Melandri 2000, Martucci 2008), whilst “Gruppo analisi” became “Gruppo numero 4”, anticipating the formulation of affidamento practice in 1983, formulated by the Milan Bookstore Collective.

Critics of the epistemology of sexual difference advocate that differenza is an essentialist concept based on biological oppositions, and offering an a-historical construction of the category “woman”. In the debate opposing equality and difference, Braidotti (1987) assumes anti-essentialist positions when defending difference as a political project. In Braidotti’s view, the fact of being a woman is historically and geographically situated. It is not simply a biological factor, it is also the historical experience of estrangement and otherness. Thus sexual difference does not just refer to biological “sex” or to the cultural construction suggested by the term “gender”. Rather, it is the inscription of both in the symbolic realm.

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18 In 1972, the French feminist group Psychanalyse et Politique organized international meetings in La Tranche and in Rouen (Schiavo 2002).
19 The 1980s Milan Bookstore Collective’s political practice of affidamento consists in the recognition of existing differences among women according to their knowledge and experience. It’s a relation among two women, one more experienced and usually older, reproducing the mother-daughter relation. For Libreria delle Donne, the recognition of women’s inequalities through the theory of sexual difference reinforces the affidamento. It then becomes possible to establish a sexuated mediation, and recognize female authority that inscribes sexual difference in the social order (Martucci 2008).
Braidotti (1994) argues that differences between the sexes provide a useful entry point for theory and politics, intentionally allowing essentialist belief to take place in the production of difference. This is said to represent a useful political strategy aimed at building up the specificity of female subjectivity, sexuality and experience "while also denouncing the logic of sexual indifferentiation of phallogocentric discourse" (131).

Differenza theories generated a number of political practices which all implied women's spatial separateness. It is only through the construction of separatist spaces that it was deemed possible to create the socio-symbolic bond that allowed women-oriented social practices to take place. Separatist spaces became laboratories in which to experiment with women's self-determination, until then denied by state institutions and by the established cultural milieu.

2.2.2 Separatism as a political practice

Female separatism was considered suspicious by the movimento in Milan for its subversive potentials, its American influence, and for its anti-patriarchal orientation directed not only to institutions but to existing hierarchies within movimento itself. Shaped by the US imported "consciousness-raising" practice, the establishment of exclusive relational practices among women in separate spaces affirmed difference among women as a precondition for situating their identities as political subjects. This occurred in almost every country where feminism became a mass movement during the 1970s (Restaino and Cavarero 2002). Through the practice of autocoscienza in separatist spaces, individual experiences became collective and autobiographic accounts allowed an almost ritual identification with the group (as I will show in Chapter 5). In a separatist group, a Heideggerian zusammengehören is said to take place and the separatist autocoscienza group becomes the place where thought and bodily existence belong to each other (Boccia 2002).

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20 This view anticipates Massey (2005)'s argument that every identity is constituted relationally through space, and makes the philosophical insights of Italian feminism of contemporary interest.
Unlike the phrase "consciousness-raising", the term autocoscienza stresses the self-determined and self-directed quality of the process of achieving a new consciousness/awareness. It is a process of achieving and (re-)constructing of the self, both the self of the individual woman and a collective sense of the self: the search for the subject-woman (Bono and Kemp 1991:9)

Towards the mid 1970s however, the political practice of autocoscienza was already declining as it became increasingly difficult to fully identify with the group. This happened when class differences among women in the groups started to create conflicts. At this time, autocoscienza was perceived as being a static process offering inadequate tools to address the emerging feelings of rage in the world outside separatist spaces. Autocoscienza, as a political practice, had been useful in the first phase of identity building, but was now perceived to be insufficient. Milanese feminists' attempts to elaborate a response to the crisis of autocoscianza were outlined in "Time, Means and Places" which appeared in the feminist journal Sottosopra, edited by the Milan's Bookstore Collective:

Adequate time, means and places require the need to create situations in which women can be together to see each other; speak to each other, to put themselves in relation. It also means to involve body and sexuality in these collective experiences, in a collective place which is not regulated by male interests. In this place we affirm our interests and we open up a dialectic relation with the outer reality we want to transform21 (1976:3).

The year 1976 was a turning point for Milanese feminism as it reached its highest rates of participation and new political practices were initiated. The occupation of via Mancinelli in 1976 and the move of the feminist group based in via Cherubini to Col di Lana launched the political strategy called pratica del fare (literally, "action oriented practice"). The adoption of a new political practice was meant to appropriate new separatist urban spaces. This involved developing opportunities for socializing and circulating ideas, and it represented an attempt to reconcile the differences among the various groups within the Milan feminist movement. Women's places, [luoghi delle donne], as the newly appropriated spaces were defined, welcomed a generation of younger women and were conceived of as spaces for enhancing the

21 These lines represent a sort of manifesto of the pratica del fare [the action practice].
relational aspect of women’s groups. This space-oriented practice was geared towards encouraging social relations among women, rather than theorizing about them. The experiences of self-help groups and autocoscienza helped to define women’s identity, but in this new phase, the emphasis of Milanese radical feminists consisted of appropriating space as a crucial resource for their political practice (Calabro’ e Grasso 2004, Libreria delle Donne 1987).

Figure 2.5 Milan exhibition entitled “To exist as a woman”. 1986. Source: Baeri and Buttifuoco (1997)

In Milan, and elsewhere in Italy, feminist separatism involved a need for separate spaces of theoretical production and political action. Separate spaces were thought to represent (or “symbolically mediate”, to express it in sexual difference theory’s jargon) women in language, culture and political institutions. Separatist spaces became a way to devise new symbolic codes through practices of women-only social relations by keeping them separated from the outside, and also as a way to explore feminine desire as a revolutionary act geared at changing existing power relations. In the words of Luisa Muraro (1993), women’s place is not the separatist space but the female’s symbolic mediation; meaning that for symbolic mediation to take place, there is a need to elaborate new codes which include women as subjects in
processes of signification. Teresa De Lauretis (1990), in the introduction to the American version of Milan Bookstore Collective’s *Sexual difference: a theory of socio-symbolic practices*, warns about the dangers of separatist spaces as a new form of marginality. De Laurentis argues that this marginality is cathartic, not revolutionary, if separatist spaces do not allow for the circulation of feminine desire which has the potential to use the transformative energies liberated within separate groups. The improvements in women’s self-awareness as potential collective actors were considered to be capable of bringing about social change. According to De Lauretis (1990), however, the *affidamento practice* (defined in footnote 18) inaugurated by the Milan Bookshop Collective in the 1980s set up authoritarian practices among women and thus went in the opposite direction to freeing desire.

The theory of sexual difference was intertwined with separatist stances in Milanese radical feminism. Although separatist, other strands of Milanese feminism refused to fully acknowledge all the political practices promoted by the Milan Bookstore collective. What all the groups had in common was the refusal of emancipation feminism and the need to create separatist, anti-institutional bounded spaces to allow the relational flow among women to take place. Meeting face-to-face in the everyday spaces of private houses, creating territorial collectives, experimenting with autonomous nurseries in the neighbourhoods, setting up women-only restaurants and archives promoting women’s history and culture all produced anti-institutional and anti-patriarchal spaces in the Milanese territory.

Concluding remarks

The action of women’s movements in Milan from the late 1960s was intertwined with ways of controlling and becoming visible in the city, which were also distinctive to the students and workers’ movement of the time. The political practices involving the use of space enacted by Milan’s feminist movement gave rise to separatism. The burgeoning theoretical formulations emerging from it are of contemporary interest as they influence ways of non-hierarchical, everyday-based collective mobilization, as will be shown in Chapter 7.

In this Chapter, I have offered a reading of Milanese women’s position in post-war urban development. Gendering Milan’s urban development provides a necessary background
to understanding the specifics of Milan and the major transformations affecting its socio-political institutions, including the shift from an economy organized around mass production to a service economy. Italy in the 1970s was facing contradictions between its old institutions and major changes occurring in the country such as a mass access to education. This translated into a dysfunctional reform system which was not able to meet the needs of Italian citizens (Melucci 1996), into the crisis of the welfare state and the appearance of new conflicts.

Anti-authoritarism was one of the key values of the 1968 social movement which also implied a denial of the family as a pillar of Italian society. The workers' struggle in the factories, the diffuse and frequent strikes, the autonomous demonstrations within the factories, and police repression, all contributed to create a climate of social revolt. This setting provided the socio-historical framework for looking at the specificities of Milan feminism. The mobilization around abortion rights, sexual violence and divorce and the opening of women specific spaces and social services in the city, demanding political modernization, expressed a rooted anti-institutional logic. Both radical feminists and those involved in "double militancy" adopted antithetic political strategies, but the aim of their political mobilizations were similarly conflict-oriented. In fact, those militants who adopted a reformist strategy to modify public institutions towards a more gender-sensitive direction can, in my view, also be defined as anti-state actors. The difference was only one of strategy; that is, they chose negotiation rather than open conflict or refusal to engage with patriarchal institutions. As in the case of radical feminism, the ideas underlying the reformist mobilizations within Milan women's movement were geared towards a drastic subversion of the male cultural codes, reflected not just within the health system and other state institutions but in the emergent new left movement.

The theories of sexual difference gave voice to a deep conflict between the sexes in Italy. They represented the need to discursively contrast the gendered construction of the category "woman" and to re-signify its traditional roles implying confinement into maternal and nurturing functions within the family. For the first time, the personal narratives of women became a public concern allowing for a collective re-elaboration and critique of their peripheral position in Italian society. The spatial practice of separatism and the political practices that emerged contributed to the creation of new linguistic and material codes for expressing women's political subjectivity, and the otherness of the female body was integrated in a separatist public. The separate elaboration of theories and political action in Italian feminism,
and in Milan as the key city of Italian feminism, was not just an initial phase of identity-building but remained a diffused praxis. In fact, the modalities of separatism were later incorporated at an institutional level through women’s research groups, parliamentary equal opportunity commissions, and the creation of women’s services, centres and organizations.

Towards the mid-1980s, in most Western societies, women’s politics underwent major changes. The women who previously engaged in collective action decided to follow individual trajectories, as did the generation involved in the political conflicts of the late 1960s-early 1980s. Whilst the theory work by reflection groups continued in a separatist frame, new groups, more keen to orient their political practices to the social, arose within schools and neighbourhoods. New associations flourished all over Milan but, in contrast to the late 1960s-early 1980s period, they abandoned attempts to build up a collective project in favour of single and more specialized political, social and cultural projects.

This chapter has given a historical account of the ways in which Milanese women have appropriated the *polis*. It has also introduced the specific spatial and political practices that were crucial to the initial appropriation of space, such as differenza sessuale, separatism and consciousness-raising. Space orientated political practices made it possible for late 1960s and 1970s feminist groups and collectives to become visible in the public sphere. The mobilization towards the early appropriation of feminist space in Milan happened collectively and, despite exogenous influences, origin and genealogy of some of the practices, one of its emerging spatial features consists of a distinctive rootedness of these centres and collectives on the Milanese territory.

As I will illustrate in the next chapter, the nascent political, social and cultural projects included archives and research groups networking with local authorities. Like other participative cooperatives, they transformed the practices matured within the women’s movement into professional experiences (Martucci 2008). Archives, libraries, radio stations, magazines and research groups within universities came to represent the official access to the *polis* for Milanese women. This passage served to undermine the initial radicalism of feminist values: the exploration of boundaries between body and thought, between nature and culture, and between individual and collective dimensions of the political.
Chapter 3. The politics of the women’s movement in Milan (1980s onwards): a spatial perspective

Over the past thirty years, Milan has radically changed, as have family relations, civil society and the Italian state. During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, a range of women’s organizations proliferated in order to respond to the changing needs of a rapidly transforming society. As I will illustrate in this Chapter, the activities of women’s organizations can be grouped in the areas of culture, society, professional training, health, work, and time conciliation politics. Sometimes recognizing the legacy of Milan’s historical feminist practice, and at other times sitting at odds with it, contemporary women’s organizations constitute a wide network which now attempts to represent the main political needs of Milanese women. Their activities address gender related issues throughout the national state up to the level of European institutions.

During the late 1960s up until the early 1980s, Milan was at the centre of Italy’s social, political and economic transformations and the precursor of feminist practices, as I have shown in Chapter 2. From the 1980s onwards, urban space provided different opportunities for feminist groups reflecting the major socio-economic transformations of the country. With the increase in female education and employment in the expanding tertiary sector, only some of the previously established groups remained, while new ones were created- with the majority of them maintaining women’s “separateness” as a political practice. The newly created spaces were often used for women-specific politics and practices but they did not necessarily originate within the feminist movement as had happened in the 1970s. New spaces for Milanese women

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22 This happened in contrast to the scarce civic culture of contemporary Italy.

23 See footnote 30 in this Chapter and section 7.1 in Chapter 7 for details of conciliation politics.

24 These practices were at the same time prevalent, though assuming different characteristics, in other cities in the US, UK and Western Europe.
after the 1980s were appropriated by a range of civil society groups with broad aims such as culture, participation, health, work and solidarity.

In Chapter 2, the Milanese women’s movement has been defined as an anti-institutional collective actor. However, from the 1980s onwards, an increased number of women entered institutional domains, such as academia or parliamentary institutions. They did so individually and they often established women-only domains within institutions to collectively deal with topics that were considered to be women-specific. Moreover, they established new women-only organizations that were not necessarily oppositional such those associated with the feminist movement: this is the phase in which women’s spaces for political action and feminist practices, from anti-institutional shifted to non-institutional. The definition of “non-institutional” is helpful to underline the position of new women’s organizations and groups which are not anymore against the state (anti-institutional) but, by belonging to civil society, they are not fully institutional even though the possibility to connect with institutions is kept open (non-institutional). In a similar way, many of the new women’s spaces became unbounded reflecting the emergent organizational structure of non-state, transnational networks, as will become clear in Chapter 7.

In this Chapter, I give a spatial reading of those women’s organizations whose specificity consists in a lower degree of boundedness if compared with the first feminist groups and collectives, in favour of a more dislocated and trans-institutional spatiality. In the next section, I will explore the shift from the predominantly independent and autonomous groups of Milan’s women’s movement to a more structured organizational form showing, in turn, how this process is intertwined with the structural and economic transformations of the country.

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25 The so called “normalization” that is the access of Italian women into institutions can also be referred to as the institutionalization of “women” as a special subject or category to be labelled among other defective categories such as youth, unemployed. Moreover the reification of the category woman does not take a critical stand towards the unbalanced relations between central and peripheral subjects and it flattens “woman” in an undifferentiated gender as if conflicts did not exist, neglecting power relationship between sexes and the social definitions of the body. Normalization is therefore a reductive process of re-elaboration of feminine identity (Saraceno 1988).
3.1 A spatial reading of Milanese women's organizations

In this section I will argue that the access of Italian women to paid employment represented a way into the public sphere. This created a fertile terrain for the creation of women's organizations, which, according to the shifts in feminist politics, increasingly assumed the feature of unbounded spaces, as will be evident by the end of this Chapter. The access of north Italian women to paid employment is one aspect of the shift from private to public brought about by Western feminist movements. Along with the transformation of the movement's political action to a more diffused form of political activity, the rise of women's centres as a new organizational form had distinct spatial features. The aim of this section is to tackle those issues relating to the shift from private to public and their importance for the gender debate in the social sciences and, in particular, for the framework of this work.

A great deal of feminist research in urban studies and in geography shows that the public and private are not just attributes of the social sphere, they are also rhetorical labels used to value some interests and to exclude other interests (Landes 1998; McDowell 1983, 1999; Rose 1993; Terlinden 2003; Wilson 1977). This work, according to Benhabib (1998) and Paravicini (2003) takes into account three possible interpretations of public space in relation to women and the city. The first one looks at the public sphere as a political space, identified in Hanna Arendt's classic The Human Condition (1958), as a place of intellect, legacy of the ancient Greece's agora' restricted to male citizens and property owners. The second definition is inspired by the liberal model of the public sphere based on an ideally egalitarian access to political representation, while the third approach stresses the lack of women's material access to the public realm. In this work, as will become more evident, I make use of the multilayered concept of "public" in the Arendtian sense: public as the space of the polis, of political exhibition and interaction as opposed to the invisibility of the domestic sphere.26

In most Western capitalist societies, the appropriation of city spaces started by feminist movements opened the way to a proliferation of women's centres, services and infrastructures during the 1980s (Doderer 2003) and the debate about gendered spaces in contemporary

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26 Chapter 6 extensively draws on this aspect.
societies became permeated by the multilayered distinction between private and public space. In the context of how gender roles reinforce spatial hierarchies in contemporary cities, both categories of public and private assume urban-specific connotations. Whereas the masculine and public side of the dichotomy is identified with the city centre, labour markets and production, the feminine and private counterpart is depicted in terms of the suburbs, home and reproduction (McDowell 1983, Dörhöfer and Terlinden 1998, Frank 2003). The distinction between public/private associated with the dualism men/women is, however, historically relative and it is differently negotiated according to its socio-cultural context.

According to the general trend of institutional restructuring, feminist organization building and increasing professionalization began to replace the movement activism and their efforts to mobilize a feminist public changed in both content and strategy. If we look at the access to the public sphere in terms of employment as opposed to the private and domestic sphere, Italy presents different employment patterns in the north if compared to its southern part. In particular, women’s access to education and to labour is more pronounced in the north, as Del Boca and Pasqua (2003) carefully document in their study on income distribution in Italy between 1977 and 1998.

Undoubtedly, women’s improved education and access to paid employment contributed to the main changes in feminist strategies informing space production in Italy. In many cases, the skills and competences acquired within the feminist movement were exported into the professions. Under the term “diffused feminism”, Calabro’ and Grasso (2004) define the new status of Milanese feminism, where the terrain of politics, culture and the professions become the new places through which women symbolically challenge power.
In a parallel way to the access to paid employment, Italian women also started to
gather in associations to define and protect their political interests. From the mid-1980s, in
Milan, a large number of women’s groups gathered in centres and organizations. Elena Del
Giorgio (2005) calls them “movement organizations” taking up the challenge of merging
together the traditionally opposing literatures on social movements and organizational studies.
This novel form of public assumes new characteristics such as the “unboundedness” of their
spaces, the fact that they can network nationally through integrated archive systems (like
Lilith27) and the fact that their complexity increases at different levels. This has manifested itself
in two ways. Firstly, through the improved institutional reach, women’s organizations can
connect to different governmental scales, in particular to the European Union. Secondly,
through the continuity of contemporary discourse of historical feminism, most of them are
ready to engage with issues regarding both the body (abortion and other reproductive

27 The nationwide archive Lilith is a network of document centres and libraries that gathers memories, politics and
research about women. More details are to be found at http://www.retelilith.it.
technologies) and women's position in Italian society (such as citizenship, representation and access to work).

The change in feminist strategy that led to a new use of space reflects, in part, the passage from reproduction, set in the domestic sphere, to the productive world of paid employment. The shift from the private to the public sphere of the *polis* for Italian women, however, didn't represent a change from one role to another, but rather an accumulation of both tasks and responsibilities, as the next section will show.

3.1.1 From private to “public”. The accumulation of domestic and service work

In western European capitalist countries such as Italy, female employment expanded over the second post war period mainly in the tertiary sector but also in service activities within factories. This kind of expansion came about in the public administrative apparatuses, in welfare and health services, education and in private services (Bianchi 1982, McKie, Bowlby and Gregory 1999). As Marina Bianchi (1982) highlights, they are the less well paid sectors, less supported by trade-unions and technologically less developed. These new kinds of occupation in the service economy boomed in Italy in the mid-1980s, enabling north Italian women to pass from non-paid work within the family to waged employment within public services. However, in most cases, this increasing involvement in the labour market entailed the multiplication of one responsibility (the broadly conceived family work) into two major responsibilities (unpaid family work and paid employment), and not just a shift from one role to the other. Sociologists like Laura Balbo (1978) and Chiara Saraceno (1982) addressed this problem as *doppia presenza* [double presence] for Italian women. In particular, they underlined the difficulties of keeping together two different spheres, such as family and waged employment, which had been historically constructed as antithetic (Saraceno 1988).

In the early 1980s, however, the offer of public services by the state was complementary to the role of the majority of Italian women within the family. While the offer of

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28 Magdalena Sokolowska in 1973 already mentions the fact that the distribution of house work changes according to the level of education, nationality and occupation of the partners. For instance, among young families of urban workers homework is better distributed as well as among young intellectual couples in Poland.
new services in Italy expanded, families’ (hence women’s) capability of using complementary public services decreased (Balbo and Bianchi 1982). This complex figure is significant for understanding what kind of changes are involved in this process of public services expansion. Firstly, the growth of new public service provision was based on those services which required more labour and in particular specialist labour skills, and for a limited amount of time, for instance in the field of leisure and sport. In contrast, the services which declined in quality and number were those services which would have relieved families (hence women) from their reproduction-connected tasks. In fact, in early 1980s Italy, the provision of assistance services, full-time schools, public canteens and nurseries decreased (Balbo and Bianchi 1982).

According to Marina Bianchi (1982)’s analysis of family and service sector in Italy, the domestic role of women has gone beyond the domestic sphere involving administration skills, the necessity to mediate institutional relationships between family and school, between family and public services, and to organize the family’s consumption. Bianchi defines as “family work”, the unpaid (mostly female) work within the family, whereas “domestic work” represents only a part of family work. Under “feminine production” are understood to be all the tasks involved in the education and nurturing of children associated with women’s maternal role. These characteristics tend to reflect women’s focus on affectivity, the space of human relations and their alleged inclination to avoid direct threats and dangers (Prokop 1978).

A quantitative study on the work conditions and family organization of seven thousand women in EEC countries quoted in Bianchi (1982) points to the consolidation of women’s preferences in work, family tasks and subjective inclinations. In the kind of extra-family work, inherent to some capitalist societies, Western European women seem to look for an affective/expressive dimension quite different to the industrial organization of work with its anonymity and alienation. From the survey, it emerged that women seek to achieve the maximum reconciliation between extra domestic work and their family role. The majority of women tend to pursue, in extra-domestic work, continuity with the content and modality of domestic and family work. The continuity between domestic work and paid employment is best represented by the welfare and education oriented professions, which consist of the production of social relations rather than goods (Mc Kie, Bowlby and Gregory 1999). This kind of profession conserves the character of low wages or gratuity typical of domestic work (Bianchi 1982).
The nature of the paid employment undertaken by many women frequently mirrors a nurturing “family” role with the majority of women employed in caring professions and providing emotional and physical labour similar to that of family work. (...). Work in service industries, such as the caring professions of nursing and teaching, as well as catering and retail work, continue to be considered predominantly jobs or career for women. And the distinction between a job or a career mark social class differences between women and women and men (McKie, Bowlby and Gregory: 1999:10).

Notwithstanding those Milanese women who were employed by the firms of Farmitalia, Siemens, Eni, Borletti and Alfa, the public debate of the 1980s defined the expanding tertiary sector as “feminized”, as an increasing number of women were concentrated in the service economy and they assumed a role of mediation between the expanding social services and the family. As was the case in the UK’s expansion of its nationwide welfare state through the NHS (Wilson 1977), in Italy economic opportunity was created for female labour with sufficient
qualifications but often without career ambitions. It was largely underpaid, not trade-unionized and only partially available for the market, because of its commitment to a "double presence".

The set of data presented above takes into account the whole active female population in Lombardy (the sum of employed and unemployed women in age of work, between 15 and 64) undifferentiated by class. These figures do not take into account the existence of piece-work in Northern Italy which, like service work, contributed to blur the division between paid work in factories and home.

When considering education levels, age and unemployment among active female population in 2003 Lombardy, the data reveal the following:

**Graph 3.2 Female non-labour force according to education levels. Lombardy, 2003.**

68.5% No degree/Primary school level
27.8% Secondary school degree
3.8% High school degree

29 For in-depth accounts of Italian women's employment history in services see *Ricomposizioni. Il lavoro di servizio nella società della crisi* edited by Laura Balbo and Marina Bianchi in 1982.
As is evident by the data above providing a context for the Lombardy Region, when looking at the level of domestic work in relation to Northern Italian women's education levels, it is clear that less educated women are more likely to choose the family over paid work. By combining the first set of data (Graph 3.2) with the second one (Graph 3.3), women between
50 and 65 years old tend to retire into the domestic sphere, suggesting that they have prioritized their family commitments over their career. The set of data on the reasons why women in Lombardy do not look for a job (Graph 3.4) confirms both Balbo and Bianchi (1982)’s research and the data above. “Family reasons” are dominant among those Lombardy women who do not look for a job between 15 and 64 years old, strikingly more so during mid-age life (30-49 years old). Domesticity in 2003 Lombardy is still a dominant choice among less educated women in Lombardy and the shift to paid employment is dependant on education levels according to kind of jobs accessed by the large majority of women (as confirmed by the data on the percentage of women employed in the service sector, Graph 3.1). As outlined above, both research and statistical data have highlighted continuity between domestic and paid work.

This section has shown that the shift from domestic to paid employment was not clear cut and implied a contamination between the two spheres through service work. The innovation to recent political practices brought about by women carrying their everyday life skills into the polis will be addressed in Chapter 7. The social and personal empowerment of women through paid work in capitalist societies is replete with contradictions. However, the reinforced identity gained through the collective access to paid work encouraged Northern Italian women to re-position themselves in their cities. In Milan, the “tertiarization” of female employment played a crucial role in the growth of non-state local organizations and services run by women. This process is described in the literature (Calabro’ and Grasso 2004) as a shift from a feminist movement to a diffused feminist ideology.
Figure 3.2 Poster of the Siena conference "Donne al centro" [Women at the centre] on the emerging reality of women's research and documentation centres in Italy. 1986. Source: Baeri and Buttatuoco (1997)
3.1.2 From feminist movement to “diffused feminism”

As became evident from about the time of the September 1986 conference *Donne al centro. Politica e cultura delle donne negli anni ottanta* [Women at the centre. Women’s politics and culture in the 1980s] in Siena, the number of services and infrastructures focussed on women-specific culture and needs was growing throughout Italy. Moreover, it was gradually assuming a formalised and legal structure. Unlike other European and US autonomous women spaces, in mid-1980s Italy, a large number of women’s centres presented strong links with political parties, the private sector and a range of institutional powers. In this phase, the fragmented Italian feminist movement reorganized itself, gradually becoming a collective actor within civil society able to promote an organised and structured transformation process (Bono and Kemp 1991).

After the engagement in legal campaigns to obtain a formal recognition of their needs, the majority of Italian women progressively became part of the political agenda of welfare interventions into the family, specifically related to their employment in the tertiary sector (Balbo and Bianchi 1982, Saraceno 1998). In this way, some of the spaces created by the feminist movement lost their connotation of “counter spaces” and became welfare-based social services, while other previous women’s spaces were reabsorbed into academia and other professional fields. From the 1980s onwards, Milan’s feminist groups, caught between increasingly rigid institutional structures and a declining social movement, promoted a new way of negotiating Milanese women’s position in the city by gathering in associations and networking in a way that largely anticipates forms of contemporary activism.

Research in the field of women’s organizations and their activities is poor. Del Giorgio (2006) argues that feminism as a diffused ideology consists in a number of organizations and associations (mainly proliferated during the 1990s) which have not received adequate attention from the existing literature on social movements. Although Del Giorgio’s work does not address the importance of spatial transformations when analyzing organizations, she suggests that the study of women’s associations should integrate the existing literature on movement
organizations. A significant step in this direction is to be found in Yvonne Doderer's (2003) work.

Doderer (2003), in her insightful study of feminist strategies informing space production, suggests a classification of women's centres in contemporary Germany which could be helpful to adapt to the context of emerging women's organizations in 1980s Italy. Doderer classifies German women's centres by dividing them into political, social, cultural and economic spaces. A further elaboration seems necessary for the Italian background, however, where only the activity of political and cultural groups is aimed at establishing an informal network and work on renewed political contents. Within political groups, new forms of strategic action are planned and interventions in the public sphere are organised from a feminist standpoint. Both political and cultural groups had a relevant role in establishing women's organizations which inaugurated renewed ways of cultural production. In Italy, as in Germany, and in the rest of Western Europe, intense publishing activity which started in the 1980s had the effect of preserving, producing and diffusing gender-sensitive information.

In the centres, some women have taken up as a political project the idea of transforming their own personal competences in collective female culture. They have been looking for discipline and instruments, in order to make culture a moment of self-organisation and therefore creation (Bono and Kemp 1991:146).

Some of the centres described by Bono and Kemp are nationally networked archives and libraries at the core of feminist production, combined with a broad publishing activity. Groups acting within the centres often take the administrative form of cultural associations engaged in research, which also provide resources for women such as information and physical spaces to meet and plan a common political agenda. Cultural and political groups also supply tools to carry out research and projects, and for the most part are self-financed through the contributions of their members. Only a few of them: are directly connected with the city council and financed by it, with the obvious difficulty of having to engage in a constant battle to retain their autonomy in terms of cultural choices (Bono and Kemp, 1991:140).
The Milan Libreria delle Donne successfully exemplifies the coexistence of a counter cultural and political dimension to a renewed and oppositional female intellectuality. From the 1980s onwards, the Milan Libreria consolidated its pivotal role as a cultural and political centre, not just as a public arena run by political activists, philosophers and academics, but it also gathered and circulated feminist writings, books, journals and documents. Like other groups in Milan, it was, and still is, characterised by an awareness of the need to give roots to women's culture by organising public debates and circulating theoretical reflections.

Groups engaging with social and economic issues are supported by institutionally negotiated areas of state intervention that recognise women's needs in the fields of education and paid employment and acknowledged women's larger responsibilities in the care for the elderly and the young (Balbo and Bianchi 1982). Often, social and economic women's associations provided top-down women-oriented infrastructures. For example, socio-sanitary services such as consultori familiari, which are normally addressed to women's health, offer demographical education, paediatric aid and psychological support for family-related matters. The legal outcome leading to the implementation of consultori familiari in Italy was achieved thanks to the organised political action of the 1970s, legacy of the feminist self-help approach discussed in Chapter 2, which was specifically bound up with criticism of a sexist health service and medical research (Perkovic 2005). Socio-sanitary services, in this respect, constitute a top-down, institutional answer to the needs articulated by feminist collective action (Vacchelli 2008).

Some of the still existing cultural and political centres fostered anti-patriarchal and community-based political activity, directed at the increased autonomy of the female political subject. Social and economic services, on the other hand, were active in fields widely recognised as targets of the welfare social policies of the 1980s. In Milan, the growth of a service economy contributed towards women's employment rates by offering the opportunity to integrate not just those skills which were acquired in the domestic sphere, but also to formalise previous competences which a number of Italian women had built up in social movement activities. This is described in the literature as a more diffused form of feminism and represented a change in the organizational features of the feminist movement. From loose and spontaneous groups and collectives ready to mobilize according to the political needs of the time, Milanese women engaged with more organized forms of activism, as is evident in the
mushrooming of women’s centres and organizations from the mid-1980s up to the turn of the century. This process contributed to a shift in different degrees of boundedness of feminist strategies of space production and it also seemed to reinvigorate the discursive inclusion of the category “woman” in Milan, and in the fragmented Italian debate on city and gender.

3.1.3 Milan without borders?

Italian women’s commitment to fight their exclusion from the broadly defined public arena raises questions as to how they are able to challenge and negotiate their unequal position in Western, advanced capitalist cities. Throughout the 1990s, a dense informal network characterised Milan’s political and cultural spaces, most of which took the administrative form of organizations or associations. A classification of existing women organizations in Milan offered by the Milan Council’s website groups them under culture, society, work, health, conciliation and professional training organizations. Similarly, a recent guide for women’s associations in Lombardy classifies the existing organizations in Milan as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture and participation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and professions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time conciliation(^{30})</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>103</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6 Table on women’s organizations in Milan. Source: “Donne Insieme. Guida alle Associazioni Femminili in Lombardia” (2005-2006)

\(^{30}\) Time conciliation policies are a set of initiatives to coordinate the times of the city (such as opening/closing hours of banks and public services) with the needs of working women. These policies come from urban planning measures promoted by a women group internal to PCI (Italian Communist Party) in 1989. Since then, many cities in Italy experimentally adopted time oriented policies and the idea was exported in Spain, France and Germany (Belloni and Bimbi 1997).
In the Milan area, there are around 100 women’s associations and their administrative features range from small-scale NGOs to women oriented services within the Milan city council. In this context, contemporary women’s organizations in Milan bring out a particular form of socio-economic intervention initiated by small-scale non-governmental organizations, more specifically defined by the Italian acronym ONLUS\(^{31}\).

ONLUS is an umbrella term defining non-profit organizations, committees, foundations, societies and cooperatives in the third sector. Women’s ONLUS are often engaged in issue-specific interventions and enact pragmatic strategies with a strong employment focus. According to Moulaert and Ailenei (2005)’s definition of solidarity economy associations, women’s organizations in Milan represent a new form of social economy structure aimed at encouraging social innovation in the economy by introducing social justice inspired practices into production and allocation systems, and by fighting social exclusion and reinventing solidarity in production and reproduction relations\(^{32}\).

Most of these small scale organizations were born in the early 1990s and their aim has been to implement the European politics of equal opportunities at a local and national level. This has been achieved through the organization of debates and training, through work on European projects and through the creation of synergies among universities, associations and professional environments. The main aim of those organizations with a social-economic focus has been to foster women’s targeted social inclusion, equal opportunity and participatory democracy. Within these associations, professionals coming from different sectors collaborate with private and public institutions to trigger European directives on equal opportunities.

As it is evident from this introduction to women’s organization activities, the contemporary spaces they inhabit are more complex than the spaces outlined in Chapter 2. After the shift from domestic to paid employment, from private to public, from atopia to toopia as I will explain in Chapter 6, the newly appropriated spaces were, at first, closely connected with the territory (as introduced in Chapter 2 and as I will extensively illustrate in Chapter 6). In a second phase, which has to do with the transformation in governance and communication

\(^{31}\) ONLUS stands for Organizzazioni Non Lucrative di Utilità Sociale [Not-for-profit organization of social utility]. Law n. 460/1997 recently implemented them.

\(^{32}\) For a detailed history of social economy sector see Moulaert and Ailenei (2005).
practices, the spaces of the women’s movement are increasingly complex and networked in ways which are less bounded to the Milanese territory, as will become clear in Chapter 7.

Women’s organizations in Milan from a non-institutional position operate within Milanese territory and beyond it, absolving the need to lobby for women’s interests and often working to meet their existing political objectives, such as, in some cases, to increase political participation. However, it is unclear if this action can still be considered “collective”, as the term collective has a mass movement connotation, while here the networking happens selectively and the levels of inclusiveness in women’s politics are dramatically reduced in comparison with the previous, more inclusive movement’s activity. Melucci’s work (1996) is helpful to disentangle the question about the “collectiveness” of women’s organizations’ political action and it provides useful analytical tools to evaluate the role of women in a contemporary collective movement. While the concept of collective action is present throughout the thesis, its in-depth analysis in the context of Milanese women’s organizations will be provided in Chapter 7.

The activity of Milanese women’s organizations varies greatly. They do not necessarily see themselves as continuous with the feminist movement of the 1970s; for instance, some women’s associations provide support in the implementation of time conciliation policies, as I will explain more extensively in Chapter 7, which first started in Milan and then spread around Italy, and then later, to continental Europe. New organizations that support the needs of women migrants are active in Milan and the work of Proficua, Crinali and Amelink represents an example of organizations active in the field of women’s migration. What has changed from a spatial point of view is the way in which the existing organizations connect to national and transnational institutions, creating a networked, unbounded spatiality which is less connected to Milan’s territory itself. Their status also changed as they evolved from anti-institutional feminist groups organized as part of a social movement to become extra-institutional, project-based organizations engaged in networking with multi-scalar institutional tiers.

The next section will deal with the changed relationship of women’s centres and organizations with the Italian state and its local and supranational tiers. Their status as extra-institutional actors makes it possible to network among themselves and to liaise with

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33 For an exhaustive overview on time-oriented policies, see: Microfisica della cittadinanza (Belloni and Bimbi 1997).
governmental and super-governmental authorities when mobilizing for a specific political or cultural aim.

3.2 Milan’s women associations as extra-institutional actors

This section aims to give a reading of Milanese women’s organization which focuses on their institutional dimension. The proliferation of women’s organizations happened outside the state domain, as in other western European cities, but in Milan their activity was increasingly oriented at building bridges and networking with the local authorities. The most active period in the creation of feminist public arenas, accompanied by intense theory production and publishing activity by Milanese feminist groups, happened during the 1980s. In this phase, women’s struggles entered the institutional sphere through the professionalisation of feminist activists (Terlinden 2003). As I have shown in the previous section, from the mid 1980s onwards, women’s organizational ability to inscribe their presence in the public sphere changed. Milanese women’s collective movement gave way to individual projects within civil society, aimed at promoting an organised and structured transformation process related to their reduced presence in the family and their increased participation in public arenas such as politics, culture, academia and labour market (Calabrò and Grasso, 2004). In this new phase, the “practical gender needs”, those needs which sought to bring gender specific issues into everyday life, had a priority over “strategic gender needs”, those needs oriented to a real change in patriarchal structures (Dörhöfer and Terlinden 1998).

Melucci’s analysis (1996) of contemporary civil society actors shows that collective conflicts are more and more “personal” as they are established around an individual’s capability to control space, time and interpersonal social relations. In this sense, while the 1970s appropriation of social spaces enacted by the women’s movement was conflict-oriented, contemporary dynamics of collective action are compromise-oriented, even though the overall aim of the conflict has not changed in principle. Furthermore, collective action produces a tension between the need to openly pursue public objectives and the need to practice, directly and personally, a transformation of the everyday. Feminist theory building has elaborated a criticism of everyday power relations that has been extended to policy formation practices as is
evident, for instance, in the so called "time-conciliation" policies for the Italian case. In this perspective, the everyday becomes a starting point for the criticism of unbalanced power relations by crosscutting every aspect and dimension of the material organization of life and by subverting its significance. The everyday can represent an appropriate terrain to produce innovation, a field which has been recently acknowledged within social science and not just by feminist and cultural studies. Leccardi (2005) describes it as a "cultural revolution" in the universe of personal and familial relations, the public sphere and every form of individual and collective action, as will become clear in Chapter 7.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the politics of separatism and the establishment of women-only spaces were recognized as a consolidated practice. From the mid-1980s onwards, in fact, institutions themselves became a space where women started to prompt political, cultural and professional initiatives. If separatism during the 1970s was a counter space, in the words of Fraser (1990), in the 1980s it become a space for defining those feminist strategies useful for reworking issues about women's presence in the political sphere and in the labour market. The main objective of the movement, that is, opposing the state, gradually changed and the new objective was not to "circulate parallel counter discourses" but to be integrated in the dominant discourses. In this changing context, the important work on sexual difference theory was not abandoned but offered as a resource. The dialectic tension between emancipation as a reformist project on the one hand, and women's liberation as a revolutionary project, on the other, was reabsorbed into a new formulation of ends and means: emancipation during the 1980s and the 1990s became a major aim to be pursued within liberation (Dominijanni 1994).

In Italy, from their position as anti-institutional, collective actors, women began to engage in a collective transformation of the social sphere on an individual basis. As happened in Germany and elsewhere, the feminist movement was transformed by its fragmentation into small-scale, professionalized, de/centred NGOs with strong ties to the state. From anti-hierarchical and autonomous structures opposed to the hierarchies of the centralized state, women associations adopted a radical reorientation visible in structure, ideology, program and strategy (Lang 2000). Even though in Italy the NGO-isation phenomenon is not so evident as it is in Germany, the transition from a social movement (placed outside, or against the state) to not-for-profit sector brought with it a structural emphasis on professionalized, but decentred,
small-scale women’s organizations, interacting with, instead of opposing, the institutions of the state. From the 1970s onwards, Milanese women’s everyday life involved entering institutions, which were accessed both individually and collectively. When collectively they were, most of the times, entered in a separatist way.

As this section has defined Milanese women’s organizations as extra-institutional actors, it is useful to explore the ways in which Italian institutions operate a selective inclusion of female citizens into the public arena and the strategies enacted by the Milanese feminist movement to obviate this problem. The next section will engage with the question of sexual citizenship as part of the controversial relationship between women’s groups, organizations and state institutions.

3.2.1 On the need to “sexualize” social relations

This section on the need to “sexualize” social relations aims to show the impasse that developed in radical forms of separatism and anti-institutional politics. This resulted in an opening towards mixed, non-separatist spaces and therefore an inauguration of ways to export feminist theories outside separateness to, possibly, include an involvement with institutional politics. In a 1986 edition of Sottosopra, the Milan Bookstore Collective launched an initiative to overwhelm a “static separatism” in favour of a “dynamic separatism”. The target of this self-criticism was the auto-imposed socio-spatial segregation of feminist separatist practices, through which women’s spaces risk becoming a-septic; that is, too detached from social complexity and which avoid the contradictions of mixed spaces. According to the 1986 edition of Sottosopra, in order for women to become full citizens it is necessary to “sexualize” social relations. A non-static separatism implies the construction of a network of social relations, what has been called la pratica della relazione tra donne nei luoghi misti [relational practice among women in mixed places].

This counter initiative within the movement was suggested not just from the historical and socio-economic contingency of the country (consisting in the expansion of employment supply as I have explained in part 1 of this Chapter) but from the need to “subtract social relations from their apparent neutrality” (1986:4). What the Milan Libreria proposed in terms of
a non-static separatism delineated in Sottosopra, was a right to participate as women, to allow their differences to be recognized as relevant and as integral to the constitution of sociality. This view finds an echo in Rosi Braidotti (1995)'s work almost ten years later:

The expectation of universality of the rational subject is vulnerable when the masculine biases of the entire process are revealed. These biases imply a systematic denigration of the “feminine”. The discursive strategy that has to be adopted consists of dismissing the sexual biases inscribed in the philosophical discourse: it's all about sexualising a form thought that is falsely conceived of as universal (Braidotti 1995:35)\(^3\)\(^4\).

To dismiss the existing sexual biases it is thus necessary, according to the Milan Libreria and Braidotti, to sexualise the apparent neutrality of mixed environments and to contaminate them with a "sexualised" form of thought.

Sexualizing social relations is a complex process that involves a reformulation of discursive, linguistic and socio-symbolic codes and it also alludes to the ambitious task of including women in the social contract which originally excluded them (Pateman 1988). Drawing on the ways in which contractual theories have left behind the question of sexual contract, which is at the origin of the public/private divide, Carole Pateman re-writes the history of classical contractarianism from a feminist perspective arguing that the private sphere has been forgotten in favour of the re-integration of the concept of private in civil society. The division made in civil society has been the class oriented division of private (meaning capitalistic economic actors) and public (meaning the state) sector. By delineating the need for a sexual citizenship, Pateman made it clear that the contemporary social contract is still based on a mutual agreement among men which guarantees their access to women's bodies. As was the case in Milan, the attempt to restrict women to domestic space was part of a larger effort to keep women's interests out of the discussion of political and citizenship rights.

A Milanese group called Osservatorio sul Lavoro delle Donne attempted to ground this view in the direct experience of its members in society, in work places and in institutions. The starting point of their debate was that the existing social order produces rules which are made by and addressed to men as producers and main recipients and to women as passive

\(^3\)\(^4\) Author's translation from Italian.
recipients of these rules. As a consequence, the male political subject is autonomous as he has
the power of creating for himself his own law, while women’s condition is not autonomous but
heteronymous as they have to live under someone else’s law. Therefore, a specific feminine
social justice is missing, because of the lack of an autonomous order which can inform general
rules for women. This lack of autonomy (and thus of social justice) is attributed to the “oneness”
of the existing order, which is the result of an exclusively masculine social contract. This would
represent the feminist legal argument to contest women’s exclusion from citizenship rights and
their re/inscription in the existing social order as “others” (Campari 1996).

Engin Isin and Patricia Woods (1999) offer additional insights on this view when they
look at the existing intersections between gender identities and citizenship. According to Isin
and Wood’s analysis, the state has not been a neutral mediator in the process of romanticizing
family narratives which were instead functional and coincident with the rise of industrial
capitalism and the foundation of liberal citizenship. Within the logic of the family romance
narrative, citizen rights were mapped according to, and in congruence with, the possibility of
access to public space. In other words, citizenship rights have marginalized the private sphere
of the home, including women and children, which were not problematized by the state to be an
object of government. They suggest that

(The selective allocation of citizenship rights along gender lines (...) reinforces the spatial nature of
citizenship itself. If we consider the spaces within which citizenship rights were developed, it is clear that
they were centred in non-domestic and, in this way, public spaces. Or, to look at it from the reverse
view, citizen rights were mapped in congruence with access to public space (Isin and Woods 1999:78).

In this context, the activity of social movements and their use of space have contributed to
make this debate richer and more fruitful. As the private/public divide is a central issue for
feminism, it has largely been down to the women’s movements that urban space has been
rendered public, embodied, invested with meaning: in so far as using strategies to appropriate
spaces and claiming media attention have become symbolic and material practices (Isin and
Woods 1999).

In Milan, women’s organizations as recipients of heteronymous citizenship rights, have
mobilized to challenge the established cultural codes based on a strong dichotomized division
between public and private. By doing so, they have challenged the spatial nature of citizenship
according to which citizens' rights "were mapped in congruence with access to public space". The networking activity of the Milanese associative world has not sought to constitute the category "women" (despite all the possible attributes such as migrant or Jewish or young or feminist and so on) as an abstract political subject in the society itself. Rather, in their commitment to a new society they have constituted themselves as autonomous social and political subjects. In order to achieve this aim, they have attempted to sexualize social relations though a form of separatism which is not static but dynamically constitutive of potential governance networks of political action.

The relational practice among women in mixed places is meant to be different from separatism and actually overwhelm "static" separatist practices. In the idea of Ida Dominjanni (1994), women's separateness from male politics has never been "separatism from" but rather a continuous questioning and an ongoing critique of it, as it is confirmed by the impact that, in Italy, radical feminism had on a mass party such as PCI-PDS, and, in general, on the left. However, the relationship between feminism and the Italian left is asymmetric and ambivalent. The nature of Italian feminism is political because at the centre of its agenda there have been - from the start - the question of the essence and the modes of political action, of its endeavours and its practices. But to affirm the alterity of feminist politics to traditional politics, in the new strategy elaborated by Milanese feminism, it is not necessary to construct a visible separatism, but rather a relational practice among women in mixed spaces.

The next section provides two examples of women's political and cultural interests, at the edge with separatist practices, finding their way into public institutions in Milan.

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35 That the signifier "woman" is both the concept around which feminists have gathered, in a movement where the politics of identity are central, and also the very concept that needs to be analysed critically, is a perfect description of our historical situation in post-modern late capitalism. The best way out of the dichotomous logic in which western culture has captured sexed identities is to work them through. In this respect, Luce Irigaray's notion of "mimesis" is highly effective, in that it allows women to revisit and repossess the discursive and material sites where "woman" was essentialized, disqualified or quite simply excluded. Working through is a deconstructive notion which has already given proof of both its strengths and limitations. Working through the networks of discursive definitions of "woman" is useful not only in what it produces as a process of deconstruction of female subjectivity, but also as process, which allows for the construction and legitimation of a gendered female feminist community (Braidotti 1992:186).

36 PCI (Italian Communist Party) was transformed in 1990 into PDS (Partito Democratico della Sinistra).
3.2.2 Institutional separatism?

The use of space, both metaphorically and physically, is strictly intertwined with the politics of Italian feminism. This is evident not just in the influences of separatist practices on Milanese feminist politics in the 1970s, but it is particularly true - although in an increasingly complex way - after the 1980s. The diffusion of feminist ideology from the mid-1980s up to the turn of the century shows that separatism as a political practice has changed its intrinsic meanings and socio-economic contexts, yet it has been absorbed as a method for women-centred political action within institutions and in civil society. Aspects of this are represented by the proliferation of women-only associations and groups and also by the creation of an Equal Opportunity Commission at Parliamentary level, by the creation of new institutional roles aimed at monitoring discriminations in the workplace and by the mushrooming of women’s area committees in Milan and women-tailored services at a local level such as the CAMD (Centri Azione Milano Donna) provided by the Council.

In 1986, the Milan Council, within a wider Council project called Progetto Azione Donna, established the Centro Azione Milano Donna (CAMD) thanks to a Milanese left wing initiative. All throughout the 1990s, CAMD were institutionally created spaces, strictly connected to the territory in specific neighbourhoods or local communities. In them, women who were already active within health shelters or other community-based committees were encouraged to gather in order to organize meetings, research groups and debates. CAMD, also called Centri Donna, had to be approved from pre-existing local administrative units such as area committees in order to be legitimized. The main objectives of CAMD were to inform women about how to use the existing services in the area and in the city and to provide new services for what they identified as emerging needs such as support and consultancies from lawyers on divorce and family related matters. Among the main objectives, those women involved in the Centri Donna attempted to obtain a space for the elaboration and transmission of women’s culture: library, video archives, and research on women’s associations. The project was successful and they rapidly spread to the Milan peripheries (Finzi 1996).

The top-down, institutionalized women’s issues through women-based territorial services in Milan were “centres of feminine democratic initiatives, transversal to political parties
and to associations, open to different aged women which gather the emergent needs and the expectations of Milanese citizens" (Finzi 1996:51). Among the recognized successes of the decentred Centri Donna there was the free services offered, the constitution of a public space where women living in disadvantaged Milan peripheries could exchange experiences, the ability to confront different life trajectories and the formulation of collective strategies. Unfortunately, the administration responsible for this project at the Milan Council changed towards the late 1990s, and with the Forza Italia administration an assembly of area advisors was called upon to evaluate both the programmes and the budget of the Centri Donna. This operation resulted in a changed administrative framework which has made the existence of the CAMD more difficult and too dependant on the governing majority in power in the Council.

Although less administratively intertwined with local authorities, another example of a feminist and separatist Trojan horse in "mixed" institutions is the pioneering experience of Vanda at the Faculty of Architecture at the Milan politecnico. In 1991, Vanda was a spontaneous group of feminist scholars which started its activity after a series of joint seminars given by Architecture professors and Milanese radical feminists. This was followed by a conference held in 1990 entitled Osare pensare la citta' femmina [Daring to think a feminine city]. Vanda’s aim was the constitution of feminine knowledges in architecture and to import into the academic environment some of the existing feminist political practices, such as “the relationality among women” fostered by the Milan Bookstore Collective. By keeping it open to political groups, students and professors, Vanda’s main activity included researching feminine utopias forgotten by the history of architecture and researching the spaces of the home, of the city and of women migrants in urban environments (Bressan and Fare’1996). Vanda came to a natural end of its activity at the end of the 1990s due to the lack of resources to devolve to the project but it still offers an archive of degree dissertations and various postgraduate theses on the topic of city and gender.

The oxymoron nested in the idea of institutional separatism represents a further challenge offered by the multiple forms that feminism assumes in the Milanese context. The ambivalence here is between entering the institutions individually (outlined above in the professionalization of feminist competences) and a conditional access to them, if collectively, determined by a separate mode of political work. In the case of CAMD, the practice of the relation among women in mixed places takes the form of a top-down institutional separatism.
where the need for exclusivity and sex based separateness in political matters is recognized
and proposed in a regulatory governmental frame. While this also mirrors the ambiguity of
women’s groups in undertaking any institutional commitment, women’s separate collective
action within territorial institutions became a necessary pre-condition for political action to take
place. Women’s separateness allowed a conditional acceptance of those institutions that were
thought to be pervaded with masculine values and whose refusal was the main object of their
struggle. Institutional separatism, as in the case of CAMD and Vanda, suggests a way of
preserving the integrity of a purely women oriented project.

Separatism has been taken up by institutions to acknowledge a political practice, the
one of separate spaces distinctive to the Milanese women’s movement up to that moment in
time, despite their efforts to be practicing the so called “relation among women in mixed places”
discussed earlier. The previously mentioned exceptions to separatist practices are represented
by double militancy women, trade unionists and their fight for legal reforms including consultori
t familiali, conducted within “mixed” state institutions. This variety of approaches gives an
account of the composite status of feminist struggles in Milan. In this complex panorama, an
open question is, thus, whether it is possible to understand the processes outlined above in
terms of institutional separatism. While the case of CAMD illustrates a top-down
institutionalisation of women’s interests, in the case of Vanda the access to an academic space
happened bottom-up. As the examples above suggest, CAMD’s separate spaces were created
as a top-down interpretation of Milanese women’s needs. They had a territorial-base within
already existing area committees. Similarly, the intellectual trajectory of Vanda group within an
academic institution in Milan strove to analogous goals. In both cases, they provided or
appropriated contexts in which political action could take place in a separate enclave within a
public institution.

Likewise, women’s organizations in Milan can be looked at as women-only enclaves in
the wider context of Milan’s civil society. Their horizontal, networked interaction contributes to
shape urban governance practices in contemporary Milan.
3.2.3 Governance networks as a political strategy

This section outlines how the process currently described as urban governance is a non-fully institutional mode of political interaction that lies in the background of changing feminist strategies of space appropriation. While the governance debate is wide ranging (Brenner 1999, DiGaetano and Strom 2003, Gerstlberger 1999, Giersig and Beaumont 2006, Harvey 1989, Immergut 1998, Jessop 1997, Les Galès 2002, Newman 2005, Swyngedouw 2005) here I will make use of those parts of the governance debate which are useful to address the activity of women's organization as civil society actors. It is argued that the extra-institutional networking of women's organizations reflects the shift from government to governance in a way that also integrates everyday practices. While this argument will be dealt within more depth in Chapter 7, an introductory and selective account of the debate on urban governance is provided in this section.

Governance as a process invokes an analysis of the state and the public sphere more broadly. The governance debate asks whether a change in governance is associated with a change in the state itself. Yet it is the power of the state - its capacities and functions, which is to be analyzed under conditions of increasing social differentiation and the decline of nation state sovereignty (Les Galès 2002). Governance can describe different aspects of the same process when exploring the organisation of the nation state and might refer to different aspects of a multilevel national, collective and social provision of public goods. The term governance immediately evokes a change in social policy regulation mechanisms and it addresses them in relation to the process of governing. While government implies direct control from formal institutions of the state on various policy level which are held the uncontested actors of implementing policies, governance designates the "indirect pursuit of effects through other agents" (Clarke 2004: 128) and points to a certain extent of informalisation and institutional loosening of policy making, becoming thus more partnership oriented. In addition, it shows that the welfare function of the state as a guarantor of the well being of its citizens is undergoing substantial changes. Social policies more and more delegate such a function to the private sphere of the individual and the family according to the ongoing transformation of statehood in contemporary capitalism (Newman 2005).
The boundaries between the three complementary spheres of the classical political science model, state, civil society, and market relationship, vary significantly over time and from place to place. Moreover, a growing number of new forms of governing have undermined the obsolete triangle-shaped model and exhibit different characteristics in the re/articulation of new tiers of central institutions, civil society organizations and private market actors (Clarke 2004). These major changes are reflected in Milan in the shift from the action of the women's movement opposing governmental institutions in the late 1960s and 1970s to the contemporary role of women organizations generating governance practices.

The debate on European cities (Les Gales 2002) can be of help in contextualizing Milan and Italy in their European embeddedness as part of the southern European world of welfare capitalism. The southern European welfare capitalism can be argued to be what Maurizio Ferrera (2005) calls southern European familialism, one characterised by the presence of strong family and kinship networks. Ferrera argues that the "familiarization" of social assistance has given rise to a distinct gender regime, with both formal and informal rules, "treating women on the basis of their duties and sending them unprotected to the market in case of economic need" (2005: 8). An understanding of how social policies have reinforced women's domestic role within the family in Italy and elsewhere is of central importance to what, in my opinion, should not just be an exclusively feminist perspective in social sciences.

Research on urban governance does address the fact that previous functions linked to social policies, combined with shrinking welfare provisions, have relocated a growing range of responsibilities from the state to the family, volunteer and non-for-profit organisations, as well as to third sector economy actors such as social cooperatives and collective services with solidarity objectives (Moulaert and Ailenei, 2005). But it fails to address the fact that these relocations are far from being gender neutral sectors of civil society. Women's organisations increasingly assume in this context an emergent role in readdressing women's related issues and in trying to increase their underrepresented presence in Italian institutional politics.

Women's organizations' collective action organized in, mainly, extra-institutional solidarity networks exert a real and symbolic pressure on institutions to promote social

37 Esping Andersen (1990) does not mention the southern European kind of welfare and classifies Italy in the corporative kind of welfare in his *Three worlds of welfare capitalism*. 
innovation, modernisation and reforms. The collective identity of Milanese women's organizations is reinforced every time they selectively aggregate to mobilize and challenge the traditional modes of political representation and by doing so re/define the idea of a specific form of women's citizenship. These demands based on identity highlight an analytical discontinuity between the contemporary movement and those of the past. Melucci (1996) emphasizes the definition of new social movements as segmented, reticular and multifaceted, where the structure itself "constitutes a way of defining and addressing conflicts in highly complex societies" (115). In the case of Milanese women's organizations, not just the content of their action but their reticular structure and the way they network also contributes to shift cultural codes towards new ways of managing the political.

It has been argued that citizenship and democracy are no longer defined along traditional lines of representation and political participation (Swingedouw 2005): NGOs and associations are called upon to replace state activities in the social sector and function as repair networks for economic and political disintegration (Lang, 2000). Networks are said to play an increasingly important role in the political process, contributing to local governance practices even though it is not always clear what kind of cultural processes take place across, not just within, them. Nonetheless, they have been recognized as "privileged sites for the production of social cohesion and collective identities in social movements" (Mische 2003:260), as they often constitute, like in Melucci's definition (and in the case of women's organizations in Milan):

submerged networks of the everyday life in which new, experimental worldviews and social relationships are developed by small groups in response to emergent tensions (Mische 2003:260).

In the case of Milan, through vertical shaped and horizontal social relationships, local governance networks intersect multiscalar institutional hierarchies transversally and create spaces which are not merely political or merely domestic. They are hybrid spaces situated between the level of political power and everyday life.

The collective action of women’s organizations in Milan enables new forms of participation and positively articulates the state/civil society relationship in a potentially democratizing mode. But in this way, horizontal governance arrangements would reposition the institutionally guaranteed meaning of political citizenship and the nature of democracy itself.
creating the danger of democratic deficit (Swingedouw 2005). Although institutional guarantees of decision-making processes have never been a priority in the Italian context, when Milanese women’s organizations have attempted to re-articulate the state/civil society relationship in a more informal setting, decision-making processes through horizontal networking have become more informal and less institutionally guaranteed. An emergent networked-like interaction, involved in shifting prevailing cultural codes, has introduced the possibility of understanding urban governance practices in Milan (as an economic, political, social and cultural territorial entity) in terms of a wide ranging, horizontally developed set of social relations. This involves not just actors, but also actions themselves which are seen in the context of networks or social relations, where systems of meanings and ways of acting are constituted (Healey and Gonzales 2005).

Concluding remarks

As I have shown in this Chapter, there have been substantial changes within the Milanese women’s movement between the late 1960s and today. For instance, the politics of separatism in Milan have changed according to different phases of the country’s political transformations. Initially, separatist politics were oriented towards an investigation of identities. From the mid-1980s, the opening of women’s infrastructures, services and organizations represented a challenge to state institutions, mainly through an increasingly complex territorial organization and diversification of activities. As the insights of past political mobilizations show, in the case of the women’s movement in Milan the emphasis has not always been on political results. Rather, the social processes themselves are at the core of the movement’s activity which sets identity building and counter cultural discourses as a priority goal for its action. Today, women’s organizations and their capability to mobilize common resources constitute at the same time a goal and a means to advance demands for a collectively driven socio-cultural change.

The wide ranging set of local governance activities conducted by women’s associations in Milan shows, as Alberto Melucci (2001) has argued, that in every contemporary form of collective action the challenge to hegemonic cultural codes is conducted at a symbolic level. Movements and collective actors offer to the rest of society an alternative way to decipher
both individual and collective experiences. The way they do this is by connecting personal experiences to external agency, challenging arbitrary dominant codes and, in doing so, suggesting alternatives (Melucci 2001). Collective action is focused on shifting cultural codes and the frame for collective action is itself the message, a symbolic challenge to hegemonic codes. As shown by the example of CAMD and Vanda, according to Melucci’s analysis, one of the main features of collective action are time-limited structures pursuing temporary objectives. Beyond the concrete results of collective actions, a symbolic confrontation with the system has taken place.

The possible involvement of the women’s movement with institutional power has always been a significant issue for feminisms (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1980). The ways in which Milanese women, involved with women-centred political action, chose to deal with this question is highly fragmented. It also varies according to different historical periods: for example, over the last 40 years many feminists in Milan have been undertaking important struggles in non-separatist contexts such as political parties and trade unions towards fundamental legal reforms. However, even in those mixed contexts of political action, they have been gathering separately to discuss women-specific political strategies, setting up the differential and separate status that institutional frameworks devolve to women’s political agendas. By recognizing that feminist political practices such as separatism have contributed to create this separate milieu for women’s politics, I have argued that separatism has been institutionally accepted as a women-specific mode of political action. While cases of contemporary radical feminism in Milan would not accept any collusion with institutional power, women’s organizations, independently from their political positioning, have taken up an extra-institutional administrative status and are open to an institutional kind of political interaction. As civil society actors, they now belong to the third sector and can therefore enact governance networks within institutional tiers.

Since the traditional lines of political representation and political citizenship have increasingly blurred, the existing women’s organizations and centres have replaced state activities by functioning as replacement networks for lacking infrastructures. The unbounded character of these networks constitutes a new form of social relationship enacted by women’s organizations in Milan in response to the emergent tensions such as the low rate of political representation among Italian women. In this way, “cultural codes” have shifted towards new
ways to manage the political sphere and towards new systems of meaning constituted through specific ways of acting: sexualising social relations to counterbalance the discursive and material exclusion of women and their interests from the phallocentric public arena (Pringle and Watson 1992). As I have shown in this Chapter, women’s interests are never fixed and are constituted in the process of engagement with other networked social actors and within the increasingly complex arena of the state.

This Chapter has provided a spatial reading of women’s centres and organizations in Milan and an analysis of the way they relate to the state and other institutions. The first part, as much as the second, tackles the shift from a conflict-oriented to a compromise-oriented political strategy reflecting Italian women’s engagement in an expanding service economy. It is argued that the transformation of the women’s movement into a diffused feminist ideology had an impact on the spatial organization of feminist political strategies which are increasingly defined through the unboundedness of the space they inhabit. The second part of this Chapter looked at the issues at stake within the contemporary Italian state and how the interrelations with it are constitutive of Milanese women’s political interests. This Chapter closes Part 1, which set up, chronologically, the socio-political background of the thesis. In Part 2, which opens with the methodological chapter, the empirical discussion and cases will be presented.
PART 2. Geography of women’s collective action in Milan

Part 2 is introduced by the methodology Chapter which offers the interpretative key for reading the empirical part of the thesis. This part draws on the interviews, archive research and observant participation conducted in Milan during fieldwork. It uses a genealogical approach for thinking space according to feminist practices; starting from the “different” female body was the first step through which Milanese activists could define their political subjectivity. The practice of narrating in separatist space became a way to expose themselves publicly, and to elaborate the so-called politics of location, a concept that largely identifies location with relational space. Ways of conceiving of collective action, separatism and difference have changed overtime and generated differential politics of location in contemporary Milanese feminism.

Following the thread of spatial thinking, Milanese women’s condition before the access to city publics can be defined as a sort of invisibility (atopia) that become a presence (topia) only through the appropriation of bounded city spaces and the subversion of old ones. Contemporary women’s centres and organizations enact different kinds of boundedness, revealing different aspects of Milan’s territorial specificity. The boundedness of feminist sites contributes to our understanding of the polis as a connective territory where the specificities of Milanese neighbourhoods constitute the background of feminist space appropriation. A visual representation of Milanese women’s organization, moreover, allows excluding the gentrification discourse as the contemporary women’s centres are still positioned quite centrally in Milan.

A topological definition of space is particularly useful when addressing women’s organizations as governance actors. Milanese women’s spatial politics are a depository for a specifically feminist legacy of practices, ways of mobilizing and distance from institutions. The everyday is identified here as a distinctively feminine terrain of interaction and creation of horizontal, non-hierarchical, political practices and forms of collective action. In the changed institutional scenario of urban governance, through an increasingly project-oriented form of collective action, women’s organizations act as networks creating an unbounded kind of spatiality which transcends Milan’s borders.
Chapter 4. Epistemology, methods and methodology

Objectivity is not about transcendence, but about accepting the local nature of all standpoints, therefore recognizing the priority of partial perspectives over global theorizations\textsuperscript{38}. 
Rosi Braidotti

Among other Western feminisms, Italian feminism has struggled to unmask the assumptions hiding behind the transcendence of objective science and to re-conquer the terrain of scientific knowledge reclaiming the value of multiple standpoints which were not absolute but located in the everyday. The questions guiding my work, when deciding upon the methods, were about the ways in which ethnography as a practice can be important for my methodology and how it can contribute to an understanding of women and space in Milan. This implied challenging notions of objectivity; ethnography is not objective but there are ways in which ethnography can be useful for my work. Therefore a critical standpoint to the so-called "objectivity" of scientific knowledge began to emerge in my thinking when reflecting on the feminist critique to modern science. This standpoint represents the initial epistemological position providing the opportunities for feminists to formulate counter-hegemonic ideas around the contested notion of objectivity\textsuperscript{39}.

\textsuperscript{38} Objectivity is one of the main pre-requisite of positivistic science and it carries with it the idea that there can be a neutral observer who does not express opinions which are external to the purely scientific ones. The Foucauldian notion of power/knowledge, post-structuralist theories and, in particular, feminism and post-colonial studies within poststructuralism, has demonstrated that such an objective detachment is not possible. The epistemology of science, as much as the Grand Narratives of the Twentieth Century, are far from being neutral and embodies views, perspectives and interests of Western, white males.

\textsuperscript{39} The theoretical systematization of the criticism to objectivity of science from a feminist point of view was undertaken by Sandra Harding (1986) in The science question in feminism. One of Harding's starting points was the acknowledgment that the pretence to objectivity of modern science could be criticized from three different positions. Firstly, feminist empiricism assumes that androcentrism of science necessarily implies a sexist bias
As Chapter 5 seeks to demonstrate by drawing on Adrienne Rich’s politics of location, the roots of feminist subjectivity lay in the body; therefore, Haraway’s situated knowledges\(^{40}\) can be understood as opposed to what Haraway (1995) calls “disembodied Cartesian epistemology”\(^{41}\). Braidotti (1991), drawing on the ethics of care and responsibility (defined in Chapter 7), argues that the act of knowing requires being situated in the body, where positionality as well as a position (in both symbolic and material space) implies responsibility. In this sense, standpoint is defined as one of passionate detachment between the knower and the known (Braidotti 1991). The feminist as a critical thinker who is able to criticize power and its modalities presupposes that the theoretical discourse that she is trying to unveil includes her own. “The first and foremost location in reality is one’s own embodiment. Rethinking the body as our primary situation is the starting point for the epistemological side of the “politics of location” which aims at elucidating the discourse produced by female feminists” (Braidotti 1992:182). This perspective guides my own work as is hopefully evident in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and it provides the entry point to both differentiate from the Anglo-Saxon feminist disjunction between sex and gender and to allow for a truly reflexive research practice.

which is internal to scientific research procedures. Secondly, feminist standpoint theories take into account the gendered differentiated perspective as a privileged grounding for scientific inquiry. Thirdly, feminist postmodernism has recognized the partiality and the anti-essentialist commitment of the feminist point of view\(^{39}\) (Di Stefano 1990). For Harding (1990) in fact, standpoint theory is a non-static position from which to analyze the static and essential positions that androcentrism assigns to women. It does so by locating the broad context and the historical conditions which determined it and also suggests ways to oppose it. Standpoint theories are about a call for dynamic feminist analysis and political practices against these forms of oppression (Harding 1990).

\(^{40}\) Donna Haraway in *Simians, Cyborg and Women* (1990b) wrote about “Situated Knowledges” in response to Harding (1986)\(^{40}\). According to Haraway, it is necessary to admit the relativity of any standpoint, not just as partial and situated within given discursive coordinates, but as mobile and connected to many correlated factors. Haraway uses the metaphor of vision and discusses a range of positionings, techniques and instruments to suggest that other theoretical models can coexist. The lesson that the social science and feminist geography within it can learn from the standpoint critique and situated knowledges is to reject a reading of the world which is based on dominant positions. The challenge one has to take when undertaking feminist research is to actively relate to the world which also is an active entity (Borghi 2000). In the work of Braidotti (1991) and Haraway (1990a, 1995) the world is seen as an active entity, seeking interaction and not as a passive site waiting for the eye of the researcher to decode it; it is a material-semiotic actor (Braidotti 1991) as the language used to represent it also plays an active role. Contrary to the humanist project, which, as we have seen throughout this work, is strongly biased in a male, white and Western sense, the post-human project is the image that Haraway uses to suggest an evolution. She pictures a re-writing of science in a feminist and anti-imperialist sense, according to new narratives including both human and non-human actors, in intelligent environments where communication is enhanced, cognitions more sophisticated and development is based on a better coordination of structures (Borghi 2000).

\(^{41}\) In *Patterns of dissonance* (1991) Braidotti explains the clashes between feminism and a Cartesian idea of the subject with the effective statement “I think therefore he is”: the dichotomy between mind and body that Cartesianism suggests does not take into account the already embodied nature of the subject and creates a false dichotomy that necessarily excludes the female subject.

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In this Chapter I will discuss positionality and reflexivity, how I negotiated the field and the kind of knowledges that I accessed when entering fieldwork and the kind of understanding that I could elaborate when analyzing the bulk of data collected during my visits to Milan. Feminist epistemology here is a necessary starting point to situate my work within standpoint theories. The central debate about feminist methodology in recent years has a lot in common with Foucauldian theories of power/knowledge but comes from a different experience, the feminist one. Its struggles are aimed at re-signifying the symbolical order from the perspective of the “other” from transcendent objectivity. In this Chapter, which follows a chronological evolution of my work, I will begin with the question of reflexivity and negotiating the field, after which I will move on to discuss the methods of my ethnographic fieldwork in Milan. I will then illustrate the data analysis process including the selection of case studies and writing up of my material. I will finish with methodological discussions about working on translation and with maps.

4.1 Negotiating the field reflexively

When I first arrived in Milan it was after four years of absence from the city where I used to live, study, work and be an activist. The first day of fieldwork was 30th April 2006 and, combined with the mixed feelings of being back, there was the question concerning the Mayday demonstration the day after. Should I go or not? After so long, what would it be like to meet the same people I had engaged in activist politics with and to establish a real renewed connection with the milieu that I had almost abandoned four years before? I noted, in a fieldwork diary, these mixed feelings about being back and the difficulty with reconnecting to my normal Milanese practices such as going to the Mayday demo and joining the ironic protest about precarious labour, Europe-wide, Mayday parade42. After discussing with a friend, how I would go about re-inserting myself into Milan, a city where I did not grow up, but where I had lived for ten years and left behind a large chunk of my adult life along with its memories, I decided not to go to the demo. Instead, I spent a solitary, sunny, Mayday afternoon in Porta Venezia park.

42 The May-day parade in Milan from the mid-1990s onwards has been focussing on precarious labour and has been networking with parades in other Italian and European cities.
trying to think through how my experiences of living and researching in Berlin and in London had changed me, my perspectives on Milan, on the movement in general and on the feminist movement in particular.

Among the thoughts that crossed my mind was that, before relating to feminist activists, be they 1970s activists, recent ones, or both, I had to think about where the Italian movement comes from theoretically and the ways in which feminist knowledges are situated in the specific context I wanted to explore. For instance, there is the whole issue of the disjunction between sex and gender, typical of the Anglo-Saxon debate, that the Italian (and French) debates only partially address. When studying Italian feminism it is important to keep in mind that sexuality is a simultaneously material and symbolic foundation and that the question here is rather how gendered identity relates to subjectivity as Braidotti (1992) recalls. The spatial frame of the body is the starting point from which I, as a feminist geographer, can be critical of the modality of power implicit in all theoretical discourse including my own. This is because feminism as self-reflexive mode of analysis uses the body as a starting point; therefore it is a sexed position, rather than disembodied. It is only through the recognition of the partiality and finitude of my subjective bodily location that I can try to make sense of the feminist spaces in Milan by rejecting the knowing subject as universal. According to Braidotti (1992) in fact, feminism as critical thought is a self-reflexive mode of analysis, aimed at articulating the critique of power in discourse from the perspective of female feminist subjects.

Reflexivity alludes, in both everyday language and in academic discourse, to the act of reflecting upon oneself and one’s experiences and giving a full account of the research process by explaining the position of researcher in relation to the position of the researched (Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002). My own research questions, field of enquiry, context, and geographical location, all presuppose that my research interlocutors were experts. Mostly activists who were used to reporting on the sense of their political actions, often my interviewees were in academic or leading positions within civil society organizations and therefore keen to use a political language that comes from the shared political practices of the women’s movement in Milan.

Thinking reflexively on my research practice and communication modes with my interviewees meant acknowledging that my position as an Italian feminist researcher coming

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43 This is explained in Chapter 2 and is an important assumption to understand the theoretical foundation of Italian (and French) feminism as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon distinction between sex and gender. This argument is recurrent throughout this work.
from the UK positioned me as a peer in the interview process. Their specific language alluding to the rhetoric of the movement such as “relationality among women”, “sexual difference”, “autocoscienza” “feminist practices” were all taken for granted as much as the more specialized language used to communicate institutional politics such as “gender mainstreaming”, “gender budgeting” “affirmative actions” or “equal opportunities”. In my case then, the alleged disparity between the all knowing researcher and the potentially disempowered researched that Gillian Rose (1997) refers to in her warning against power hierarchies during the interview process, did not take place.

By redefining the use of oneself as an instrument of research, the positivist standpoint of the all-knowing researcher is neutralised by sharing power with their research participants. As Al-Hindi and Kawabata (2002) argue, this could give rise to a loss of control which is common in a truly non-hierarchical conversation. In my experience of interviewing in a women’s organization in Milan, during a focus group one of the women became emotional during her own story about the organization in question and had a tearful reaction to the moving narrative that she was telling about the aims of the organization. As this was the first time they were asked for an interview about their organization, the representation of it to an external interlocutor, based abroad, probably made the woman feel proud and at the same time strongly identified with the activities of the organization. As Al-Hindi and Kawabata (2002) observe, ethnographers have begun to push the idea of reflexivity beyond application to the researcher, to include research participants’ insights and other’s constructions of us.

My own, personal reflexive practice towards my research and the wide range of people I met in Milan during my fieldwork in feminist meetings, in archives, libraries, both in informal conversations and during interviews was to never to try to impose my differential position as a researcher based-abroad, but to show my genuine interest and knowledge of the issues at stake in Italian and Milanese feminism, showing that I, as an Italian woman, share the same genealogy of feminist thought notwithstanding the different positions within it. Because of my age (mid 30s), racial origin (white Italian) and political position (feminist whose political ideas were forged in the Milanese experience of centri sociali) I was immediately identified as belonging to the “young” or then so-called third wave feminism (see Feminist Review 2007). What I tried to accomplish in my research process and communicative practices is the “being situated at the margin as a condition of radical openness” that bell hooks (2004) poetically
describes in her famous essay *Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness*. The external positioning to the “colonizing mentality” and the choice of a space that is close to the oppressed rather than with the oppressor is the one which leaves more room for manoeuvre to envisage possible transformations. As bell hooks states:

This choice is crucial. It shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts. It informs the way we speak about these issues, the language we choose. Language is also a place of struggle (bell hooks 2004:153).

By opposition, language is a place of struggle also in terms of the silences of the people who have been silenced or can only speak with a “broken voice”. This is also the case for the vast majority of women in the still patriarchal Italian society.

To conclude with a feminist geographical insight on reflexivity with Al-Hindi and Kawabata (2002), the reflexive approach offers in general, and to my work, three kinds of advantages. Firstly, reflexivity helps to understand how the identity of both the researcher and the researched are mutually built during the research process itself. Both the location of the researcher and the location of the participants are important as are their shifts in relation to the interactive context. Secondly, when locating the researcher politically and in relation to the researched, reflexivity helps to make the process more clear and to avoid intimidating disparities and hierarchies between the subject and the object of research. Thirdly, the reflexive approach, by helping to share power with the participant validates the participant fully as a knower, it has an empowering effect on the participant who feels the depositary of the knowledge she is sharing.

In the next section, I will illustrate what it meant for me to enter the field with the baggage of theory I had thus far explored, and to be on the brink of discovering a new world in the making.
4.2 Entering the field: ethnographic methods

Ethnography as a practice has been increasingly incorporated in Geography. It takes into account the existing questions and tensions around different subject positions and forms of knowledge as fundamental (Jupp 2005, unpublished source). It is, therefore, by following the main principles of ethnographic research that this work has been conceived. My fieldwork in Milan incorporated ethnographic methods of social research with the awareness that there are a variety of ways of conducting ethnography in research. When entering the field my research questions were the structuring device and the lens through which to interpret the reality of my research encounters and engagements. In which ways have feminist politics and space been mutually constitutive? Considering that the socially constructed idea of domesticity kept women away from the polis, how did Milanese women re-appropriate that space? In which ways have the dominant definitions of public and private been influential in this process?

The time I spent reviewing ideas and research drawn from previous studies, both in the UK and in Germany, helped me to guide my search for secondary data towards initial conceptual tools framing the research. Also, talking to other people who have had research experience in the chosen setting was, as Hammersley (1990) points out, useful for identifying initial domains and factors for further exploration and analysis. My fieldwork approach met most of the defining characteristics of ethnographic research as defined by Hammersley (1990). My research was guided by Hammersley's definitions together with theory on social movements and feminist geography; moreover it was mainly qualitative, conducted locally in Milan, where people's behaviour was studied in everyday contexts rather than experimental conditions. The kind of everyday I explored when in Milan was the one of political meetings and debate about feminism. Therefore my participant observation of feminist politics in Milan represents the everyday while I see the interview as an experimental condition, where the interviewee is actually jolted away from her everyday to give an account and think reflexively on her own political practices.

Ethnography, originating in anthropology and now integrated throughout the social sciences including Geography, has a specific approach to what constitutes data and pays close
attention to social practices. It also puts a strong emphasis on doing fieldwork requiring the researcher to spend a significant amount of time working and engaging with those whom she is studying, immersing herself in their everyday routines. This process is generally formalized as participant observation (Hammersley 1990). The data is collected using an unstructured approach, focussed on a single setting or group which, in my case, was the Milanese feminist movement and women’s organizations. As I will illustrate later, their analysis involved interpretation of meanings of human action and takes the form of a verbal description and explanation.

In geography, as in other disciplines, feminists have pushed the limits of what counts as data using a range of different sources such as photographs, diaries, letters, songs and artworks as in the majority of the cases few other sources were available for capturing their voices. As Meghan Cope (2002), (but also Rose 1997, and Norwood and Monk 1987) argues, the use of diverse sources assumes an importance given the hegemonic position of masculinist geography in the production of knowledge privileging some data rather then others. Beyond participant observation, and communication with key actors, during my fieldwork I also worked in archives to get a sense of the spaces of the Milanese feminist movement which were not mapped in published sources (Calabro' and Grasso 2004). According to typically feminist anti-Cartesian methods of social research, I have used a mix of different inputs to build a rigor in my work. I used pictures, political flyers, groups’ political statements and communication, addresses of collectives retrieved in archives, unpublished sources, private archives and conversations with activists and experts to make sense of the core of my research. As Meghan Cope (2002) observes, it is often about how the data is collected which determines the epistemological basis of research. The choice of whom to interview and the questions asked, as well as the nature and the place of the interview, are all important factors in the construction of the research process, as they create conditions that exclude others and this inclusion/exclusion of methods has epistemological implications for what we consider as limits and validity of knowledge. As I will show in paragraph 4.3 of this Chapter, however, I made a selective use of the data I collected.

In order to structure the content of this Chapter to reflect the phases of my work, I will adopt Sandra Harding’s (1987) distinction between methods and methodology. While method
is a technique consisting of all the actions involved in the gathering and analysis of data such as listening, watching, and examining documents, methodology concerns choices about how to use these methods, for instance, which questions to pose, which evidence to prioritize and how to analyze the collected data (Sprague 2005). Participant observation, archive research and interviewing are some of the methods I used to collect data during my fieldwork in Milan, as I will explain in the next section. A discussion of the methodology used in this work is included in part 4.3 of this Chapter.

4.2.1 Archives and participant observation

Secondary data, mainly from English, Italian and German literature, research in libraries and the archives of the feminist movement in Milan (in particular the Fondazione Badaracco archive), participant observation and semi structured interviews (which will be dealt with later separately) constitute the main bulk of methods of this research. During my week-long work in the Fondazione Badaracco archive, I negotiated access to it with the archivist. Thanks to an introduction by other activists I was able to open the files of the Milanese Centro Studi sulla Storia del Movimento delle Donne in Italia [Research Centre on the history of the women’s movement in Italy] where I tried to make sense of the spaces in which feminist gatherings used to take place, collected hints of locations, noted addresses and the activities of these groups. The temporalities involved in the experience of some groups within the movement in Milan were sometimes short. For instance, Architecture Collective was a collective that did not last long, but these women tried to conceptualize Milan as a city from a women’s perspective, raising similar questions to the ones which, for example, feminists were raising in Western Germany (Arch + 1981, Bauwelt 1979, Dörhöfer 1980).

While researching in the archives, I tried to focus on the ways in which I could build a relation between the different temporalities involved in my research, the groundbreaking activities and the spaces that the feminist movement were gradually appropriating in Milan. This happened through political manifestos for some groups, in which they attempted to define their identities as a group through specific political agendas and explanations of political
strategies. Also, during my work in the archives of Milanese feminism I could access pictures and documents of the movement to make sense of its evolution as it happened after the 1970s.

As Rose (2000) makes clear when addressing archive work, cataloguing and archives have to be thought through carefully as devices used to frame and discipline material. Each document is classified under a specific name, made coherent under specific collections. The act of archiving material transforms the meaning of the object, document and picture which is attributed and, at the same time, invested with a new meaning. In this sense, Rose (2000) argues that the archive needs to be seen as an area where knowledge is organized arbitrarily and warns against the risks that such disciplining of knowledge implies. As Crang (2003) argues drawing on Rose (2000), “the presence of the researcher with her specific questions, background and knowledge might disrupt the neat categories” (133). Therefore, the reflexive practice of archive work results in a combination of three sets of orders: that of the archive itself (in my case the archive of Fondazione Badaracco) the visual, documentary and spatial resources of its contents such as flyers, political agendas and other documents, and my own desires and imperatives to trace a connection between feminist politics and the urban spaces in Milan. As Rose (2000) argues, the meaning that we gain from material in an archive exceeds its classifications.

My research at the archive Fondazione Badaracco represented my chance to enter in a direct dialogue with the original material produced by Milanese feminists in the 1970s and allowed me to access the the kind of aesthetics, the semantic approach and the ways of communicating expressed by the groups studied. The experience of researching at the archive added to my fieldwork a range of spatial detail about the groups researched and helped me to frame visually and spatially the primary sources and documents of early feminism in Milan. The process of looking, evaluating and selecting material when researching at the archive was guided by my research questions and was no doubt helpful to enter into dialogue with the material and make sense of the unorganized, fragmentary traces that are left by that particular experience. The archive's attempt to re-organize fragmentary traces by cataloguing material such as posters, slogan, leaflets and pictures left by Milanese early feminism has been helpful in order to give my search a sense of direction and selectively guide my investigation of primary sources.
Thanks to the help of one of the activists who started to engage with my research I could also access the private archive of Vanda, a group of feminist architects within the Architecture Faculty at the Milan politiecnico, which, throughout the 1980s, produced degree theses and doctoral dissertations on the topic of city and gender. In particular, the dissertation of Rosaria Fichera (1996) *Sotto il Vulcano. Percorsi spaziali e politici delle donne a Catania* [At the feet of the volcano. Spatial and political path of women in Catania] was a great inspiration for thinking the city as gendered and for identifying the issues at stake in connecting the politics of feminism and its spatialities. In general, the women I came across during my fieldwork have been a precious resource of new contacts, information, providers of access to the personal collections of key movement publications, advice, directions and suggestions which had a snowball effect in the proliferation of data to gather. They also welcomed me and integrated me in their debates and meetings showing a great availability and enthusiasm in sharing their experiences.

This favourable circumstance facilitated my access to the field as an observing participant. Hammersley (1990) distinguishes observation from a distance to participant observation. Participant observation implies that the researcher is given the possibility to actively learn through exposure or involvement in the day-to-day routine activity of participants in the research setting. As I did in Milan, in several Milan Bookstore Collective’s and other meetings and book presentations, participation refers to presence in and interaction with a site when an activity or an event is occurring. While my more or less active participation in Milanese feminist events and meetings can be looked at as an observation from a distance, the personal conversations with activists and the fact of actually being caught up in the relational network of ongoing discussions, life stories, contacts and the fact of being welcomed and perceived as part of the relational flow made of me a participant observer. Again, my research questions and hence the kind of theory focussed on the interrelations between space and feminist politics informed my action.

Harmmersley’s (1990) ethnographic theory was, all the way through, a fundamental device to help to determine what to include and what to leave out of my observation, to compare patterns of events and what is actually observed and to establish a network of non-hierarchical relationships expressed through statements defining linkages among concepts. It was also the main structuring device that informed the questions of the semi-structured
interviews which I conducted, over the period of a year, with activists, academics and members of women's organizations in Milan. The interviews were the formalized outcome of my fieldwork and the choices of whom to interview, how and in which setting, will be explained in the next section.

4.2.2 Interviewing

In my experience of conducting fieldwork in Milan, researching is never a straightforward process and even the research questions guiding the research change and adjust to the context of fieldwork that the researcher cannot predict. Direct experience, as it progresses, generates an increased knowledge of the participants and therefore more data is fed into the project. The risk of designing the interview questions in advance can be that they become inappropriate to the situation of the interview or to the activity of the research participant. Another risk is that the actual questions which the researcher might want to ask change according to shifts and various re-adjustments of the research questions informing fieldwork and the whole research process. During my stay in Milan, I tried to obviate these potential risks by attempting to keep flexible and alert towards the slippery terrain created by the temporal differences between planning the fieldwork and actually carrying it out.

When arranging the interviewing schedule, in order to present myself and my research, I emailed the interviewees with a list of questions once they had agreed to meet me and prior to the interview. Given the level of impersonality of the Internet, which does not deliver the sense of reassurance of face-to-face encounters, this advance email helped them to situate me and my work. Moreover, it gave them time to think about the questions and to elicit some insightful thoughts, thereby making the interviewing process smoother. The email contact also facilitated logistical details about where to conduct the interview.

Interviewees during my fieldwork were key informants on the broadly conceived Milanese women's movement and its spaces and, as outlined in Chapter 5, women with recognized expertise and experience in my topic of interest. In some cases the members or managers of women's organizations did not carry out specific feminist political action, but they are important social actors in the mobilization of women-specific policies in Milan. They are
also active in the creation of mobilizing assemblages (discussed in Chapter 7). The women interviewed in Milan over a year, in five separate visits lasting two weeks each, ranged from feminists who were active in the appropriation of urban space during the 1970s, to contemporary activists, stakeholders and academics. Because of the background of the respondents, the vast majority were quite used to being interviewed. My initial idea of showing the 1970s activists a map of feminist spaces which I had previously drawn did not work: they looked at it briefly but nobody felt inclined to comment on it or draw connections among different groups. This is probably due to the fact that they concentrated on what they wanted to say and also that the task I was asking them to perform (drawing and commenting on a map) was not particularly appropriate to the kind of role of experts they were representing at the time of the interview.

In-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews are a useful device when interviewing experts. This method allows the speaker to explore the topic in detail and to deepen the interviewer's knowledge of the topic (Hammersley 1990). In semi-structured interviews there is no correct answer and open ended refers to the fact that the interviewer is open to all relevant responses, leaving the flow of communication to take the direction that the interviewees feel they want to take in a way that is not constrained by the interviewer. This particularly suited my research as it gave the speakers more room for manoeuvre to describe the specificities of their work. As no limit is set to the length of the response, the interviewees were free to offer personal insights to their answers. The depth refers to the fact that the interviewee is expected to reply to questions with some depth and the researcher is free to ask for more details. During my fieldwork this approach was particularly fruitful as it helped me to address issues of space when the interviewees were side stepping this aspect. Semi-structured refers to the fact that there is a list of unspecific questions, set out as broad topics that the researcher would like the participant to address during the interview. Therefore a structure is given to the interview without being a constraining structure that forces the speakers in a direction they do not want to go. This last aspect to in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews was particularly successful in providing a loose structure which allowed the conversation to flow and to cover all the aspects of the questions.

Interviews were, during my fieldwork, an effective device to expand my knowledge of areas, practices and specific aspects of my topic about which little is known. Even when some
facts of the Milanese feminist movement are well known, the particular emphasis on space induced by my questions generated in the interviewees new perspectives and insights on the same facts. The pitfalls of using semi-structured interviews were, however, that sometimes the interviewees felt they had to follow a suggested trajectory, precluding in this way the infinite range of other possibilities of asking (other) questions on the same topic. Moreover, the questionnaire was standard for all the interviewees and, for instance, the questions about public/private and other movement-specific issues were probably too customized for one kind of interviewee (the activists)\footnote{Appendix I reflects the questions that oriented, in a flexible way, the open-ended, semi-structured interviews.}. More specific questionnaires, according to the role of the interviewee, would have probably optimized the results. This would have raised, however, other kinds of problems in the data analysis phase; as will become clear from the data analysis section, a non standardized questionnaire would make a cross-sectional data analysis impossible and would raise questions on the generalizability of the interview results.

While this Chapter has so far dealt with the methods adopted during my fieldwork in Milan which made the gathering of qualitative data possible, the next section will deal with the methodology and the epistemological implications of each methodological choice.

4.3 Methodology: data analysis and writing up

The accumulation of material such as field notes, minidisk tapes and transcripts, flyers, presentation leaflets, organizations’ publications and studies, statistics, copied documents and pictures provide a sense of materialization of the work accomplished during fieldwork. The sense of satisfaction that this vision could give is, in Crang’s (2003) words, “the lull before the storm” as the mass of material has to be transformed into research findings. To better describe this disenchantment, for instance, it is sufficient to recall that the tapes themselves are not really data until they are transcribed and the systematization of the material only becomes data when is ready to be used and the sense of it is allocated a position in the analysis. Analysis is not simply an issue of developing an idea and writing it up. Rather, it is a kind of critical thinking by writing that tends to reveal the flaws, the contradictions in our ideas, forcing us to look, to
analyze in different ways and rethink (Crang 2003). In other words, writing is a constitutive act as new meanings are created and systematized while writing and the generative power of writing also has the potential to build theory.

One of the most efficient methods to produce theory is to capture material and adapt it to our personal space, as Walter Benjamin (1999, p 314 quoted in Crang 2003) argues. We import, represent and reconfigure material from the original context to new relationships determined by our framework of analysis and in this way we produce insights. The material reflects the tension between its intrinsic intelligibility and the sense that is brought by the researcher. This is to say that two researchers placed in two different moments in time would produce different research when using the same documents and piece of information. This insight from Benjamin (quoted in Crang 2003) recalls Cope (2002)'s argument that analysis refers to more than the methods used to analyze data, but interpretation refers to reflection, re-evaluation “that involves thinking about the meanings and implications of the data rather than merely the results” (51). This recalls the epistemological question about how knowledge produced in research posed at the start of this Chapter. Methods and the researcher’s choices on how to use given methods are a result of different ways to pose questions, collect evidence and analyze data (Sprague 2005). Sprague draws on the existing interconnections between methodology, epistemology and method when she argues:

Each methodology is founded on either explicit or, more often, unexamined assumptions which constitute a particular epistemology. That is, a methodology works out the implications of a specific epistemology for how to implement a method (Sprague 2005: 5).

The choice about how to use the interview material was, in my work, not a straightforward process. Once I listened to the recorded interviews, I made sense of their content by taking notes and in most of the cases proceeding with the transcriptions. It was not until I started writing the empirical chapters of my thesis that it became clear to me how I would use these transcriptions. By writing, I started an increasingly redefined elaboration of the existing interconnections between feminist and other civil society actors and the use they make of urban space. At that point, the nebulous idea about the possible use of the interview material became gradually clearer. Each interview had a different sense and told different stories about the interconnections between women’s politics and their spatialities, therefore I ended up
choosing three case studies which were more illustrative of the diverse kind of spatiality
delineated in each one of the empirical Chapters of my work (5, 6 and 7).

The common denominator among the collected interviews was that in each interview
the interviewees are informers and the reading of the data I aimed to provide is literal. This
means, in Jennifer Mason (1996)'s words, that the analysis takes into account form and
content, including aspects of structure and style. Through interpretation, the data was given a
sense which is internal to my personal research horizon (in the sense of Benjamin delineated
above). Part of the process of generation and interpretation of data is also the reflexive
positioning of myself as part of the data, seeking not to underestimate my own role in the
research process. In Mason's view, the reading and analysis of data should be able to capture
and express those relationships. But this does not imply that the reading and the way to use
interviews has been uniformly standardized within the empirical chapters. In fact, although the
methods used to gather the interview data are the same, Chapter 5, because of the topic dealt
with, presents a different methodology to the one used in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 5 deals with the transformation of feminist political subjectivity in Milan.
Therefore, the way I use the interview material is in the form of narratives that take into account
the relational links with the interviewer; while a first level of narrative communication aims at
making sense of the speakers' experiences, a second level of narrative communication offers a
sophisticated reply to the interviewer's question (Taylor and Wetherell 1999). As the Chapter's
aim was to capture a subjective transformation, the comparative dimension among interviews,
the kind of similarities and differences in interviewees' language and communication style, the
kind of rhetoric and vocabulary used by the speakers, all became important factors to pay
attention to when transcribing and translating. The horizontally comparative work consisted of a
cross-sectional indexing across different themes which were to be found in most of the
interviews.

In order to depict the transformations of political subjectivity, I had to only use the
interviews with feminist activists, 15, and not the whole bulk of interviews. The reasons for this
selection lay in the fact that not all the interviewees would identify with the kind of
transformation at stake in feminist subjectivity and hence the interviews with women's
organizations managers did not provide, for instance, sufficient elements for conducting a
cross-sectional analysis of the data. Themes such as personal/political, individual/collective,
separatism, sexual difference are all inherent to the feminist movement and were almost spontaneously addressed by all the activists in their interviews. This did not happen in the interviews with women’s organization managers although the questions broadly elicited the topics. As I make clear in Chapter 5, while coding the transcriptions I focused on a literal reading of the available interview material that involves looking at the form, structure and style across the semi-structured interviews as suggested by Mason (1996).

Chapters 6 and Chapter 7 specifically deal with two kinds of spatialities produced by the women’s movement in Milan. In this case, the non-cross sectional data organization involves ways of seeing and sorting my interview material which do not necessarily use the same lens across the whole. As in Mason (1996), it involves looking at discrete parts, bits and units within my data set, and documenting something about those parts specifically according to the case specific context. This kind of methodology presupposes that the approach is specific and looks at the particular features of each case, rather then individuating commonalities. Inductively, the single interview/case is adapted and analyzed accordingly to the theory which has been set up in the chapter. Consequently the result of this approach to data analysis is holistic rather than cross-sectional and in the kind of social explanation that I can build from my argument is developmental rather then comparative. This approach attempts to trace an account for the development of social phenomena and processes at stake in analyzing the connections between the politics of Milanese women and the case specific appropriation of urban space.

The phase of analyzing and writing-up creates levels of abstraction that Raghuram and Madge (2008) summarize as scale, temporality (that consists of genealogy and history) and the ability to move between levels of abstraction holding meaning in different contexts, in other words generalizability. The challenge of producing good research is identified in finding the subtle balance that provides both a contextually rich understanding of a historical and spatial formation and is able to move between different levels of abstraction, holding on to the specificity-generalization dimension of research. What I hope I have accomplished in my work is the result of a series of choices about what to include and what to exclude in the final work, choosing elements that were more significant to my particular research framework. As Johnson et’al (2004) quoted in Raghuram and Madge (2008) remind us, the series of choices and therefore the process of abstraction is always a social, cultural, political and emotional process.
(223) and it constitutes the core operation intrinsic to every theorization; it is fundamental to academic work to be aware of the very scope of abstraction. The findings in my research, including histories and genealogies of the Milanese women’s movement, are sufficiently contextual and viable for generalizations about urban space appropriations by women and feminist movements. In the next section I will deal with three different levels of abstraction that I had to take into account, that is, working with translations, with different temporalities and with maps.

4.3.1 Working with translations

As an Italian doing fieldwork in Milan, I obviously collected all my interviews and data in Italian, which was also the language in which I carried out research on secondary sources to integrate the framework previously constructed from English language literature. As a researcher based in the UK at a UK institution I took up the challenge of writing the thesis in English and this, of course, opens up some translation issues from Italian to English in the phase of the data analysis. I translated all the quotes that I decided to use in the case studies selected for the empirical chapters in a way that could deliver the full sense of the interview, and the translations of certain rhetoric or Italian phrases resulted in a conversion which was not always literal but had to rely on, and be “filtered” by, my own understanding of them. Where I was not sure I asked a friend, who is English, speaks Italian and is familiar with social movement literature; but obviously the fact of translating from one language to another opens up some linguistic mediation questions (Bassnett 1980). Although I believe I have been able to provide an accurate translation of the sense produced in Italian by the interviewees, this language-to-language mediation raised a methodological problem in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, in fact, I refer to the interviewees as speakers because the topic of the chapter deals with political subjectivity and therefore needs to be analysed using a methodology used by critical psychologists. It presupposes a work which is focused on text and draws its meaning from literal accounts of spoken communication. Therefore, working on a translated text made it difficult to capture the hidden interpretative repertoires that the speakers were alluding to without referring to them explicitly. This happened because, in the translation
process, the translation would not always work in a literal sense and I had to use paraphrases to create meaning in English. As a result, the kind of methodological approach I had to think of to obviate this problem was slightly different to the one I was thinking of at first and my methodology had to adapt to this "technical", translations-linked kind of obstacle. After some twisting and adaptation of the analysis, I nevertheless stayed with the initial idea of looking at my interviewees as informers and also as political subjects whose identity is negotiated in talk and therefore performative according to Taylor and Wetherell (1999), drawing on Judith Butler (1997). This is part of researching reflexively and taking into account my role in the interview process and the fact that the interviewees in their narratives were giving me a precise account of where they stood politically during the interview, situating their perspectives and knowledges in a specific theoretical tradition within Milanese feminism. In this way, not just their political positioning but their identity was performatively negotiated during the interview.

As Chapters 6 and 7 are also reworked from Italian to English, the same linguistic mediation therefore applies to them too. In these chapters, the interviewers are key informers whose salient quotes are interpreted in a literal reading which I tried to reproduce in translation in a way that includes an attention to content. The next section will deal with another level of abstraction, that of working with different temporalities.

4.3.2 Working with different temporalities

Another level of abstraction in my work concerns the fact of working with different temporalities. As I hope is clear from the Chapters 2 and 3, the work is thought of diachronically, that is the focus is on two different moments in time, the 1970s and early 2000s, in the same place, Milan. Although what happens in between these two periods is significant for understanding the important changes which occurred over space, the time simplification is useful to address the transformations in the ways of organizing the women's movement, policies and mobilization in Milan. While my work aims to provide a clear genealogy of what happened between the 1970s and the early 2000s, the diachronic choice offers an in-depth perspective on the context of ideas and the political, social and urban circumstances which were the setting of the first appropriation of city spaces by the women's movement. A spotlight on the contemporary
situation allows identifying the changes in a straightforward way that takes into account the evolutions involved in the shift from the feminist movement and a diffused form of feminism, from government to urban governance and the spatialities involved in these shifts.

As I have argued in Chapters 2 and 3, the shift from feminist movement to a more diffused form of feminism that eventually accessed institutions and professions happened between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, while the burgeoning of women’s organizations in Milan occurred from the early 1990s onwards. The importance of the comparative approach between the 1970s and today lies in the fact that the differences are relevant even though there are elements of continuity. During the 1970s in Italy, as in other Western countries, the feminist movement laid the basis for a future transformation of urban space contributing to the creation of public, women-oriented infrastructures. In this way urban space became gendered in the political debate and, through the political actions of women activists and the gendered construction of space, became a key element in new radical urban debates ranging from neo-Marxian approaches to new architectural discourses on the design of space. The 1970s as a period is therefore significant because of the influence feminist movements had on the way the city is perceived and used, and the criticisms that influenced political strategies concerning the use of urban space. Feminist politics constitute, in this context, a relevant analytical tool to capture the main political and social changes over the last 30 years.

Another importance difference between the 1970s and contemporary forms of women’s centred collective action is that in the 1970s, subversive ideas advocated by feminists were radical and transversally cutting across every social class. Therefore the access to feminist politics and to different sorts of urban spaces appropriated by the feminist movement was possible for a large number of activists. Feminism became a mass phenomenon that assumed different forms: street demonstrations, occupations and experimental ways of living, as I have shown in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 5. In contrast, current access to feminist politics is less inclusive and limited to a smaller number of experts, academics and women with a higher level of education and specialization, as I have shown in Chapters 3 and Chapter 6. These shifts have an impact on the ways in which urban space in Milan has been appropriated and used.

Public and private spheres in the 1970s were sharply separate categories defined along gender lines. While the spaces connected with both public and private spheres were
mostly bounded spaces on the Milanese territory, today public and non-public spaces are increasingly merging in the multifaceted reality of contemporary civil society. The recent shrinking of resources mobilized by the public sector, co-responsible in the proliferation of governance practices, is counterbalanced by the rise of non-public actors informally networking in order to collectively achieve shared political objectives based on common interests. From the 1990s onwards, this process implies a progressive disconnection to territorially grounded kind of spaces in favour of a more unbounded, networked kind of activity that make collective action possible even at a distance. These categories like bounded and unbounded, radical and institutional, social movement and civil society, specific women’s spaces and networked spaces are abstractions and therefore useful for theorizing the different spatialities of the women’s movement between the 1970s and contemporary Milan.

Working with abstractions in the case of different temporalities means being aware that the categories are not fixed. Certainly in the 1970s there were networking activities going on alongside territorially organized feminist actors and, nowadays, there are spaces like Mondodonna, shown in Chapter 6, that are bounded and operate in strict connection to the neighbourhood while also networking with other organizations. In the same way, there were groups within the 1970s feminist movement that were institutionalized, while there are still fringes of radical and anti-institutional feminism in contemporary Milan. While the nuances within different categories are helpful to fully understand the specific context of Milan and its peculiarities, the broad lines of abstractions are helpful for the process of understanding the nature of the transformation involved, both subjective and political, and offer a generalization that can be useful for other contexts of analysis.
4.3.2 Working with maps

During fieldwork in Milan, through consulting secondary data, visiting archives and recollecting spatial memories, I mapped onto the Milanese territory the centres appropriated by the 1970s feminist movement. The outcome of this work is Figure 6.1 in Chapter 6. For practical reasons it has only been possible to map the more explicitly public gathering spaces of the first feminist groups in Milan, as the private houses which activists offered for feminist meetings changed too often and the memories about them are fragmented and hence difficult to reconstruct rigorously. Although Chapter 6 refers to the polymorphic spaces of private houses as potentially public spaces, the deliberate choice here has been to map the visible public spaces as they are the ones that played a major role in inscribing Milanese women's renewed role in the urban territory.

As mentioned in paragraph 4.2.2, initially the map of feminist spaces had a double function as I thought I would use it during the interviews but as explained above, the attempt did not work. After this exclusion, the sole function of the map was the visualization of the presence of the first feminist groups in Milan and their symbolical and material appropriation of urban space. Being an original map which situates feminist centres in the Milan territory, it proved particularly useful for evaluating the positions of the groups in relation to the categories of centre and periphery as explained in Chapter 6. Another reason why the map is useful and has been a valid methodological tool in my research is that it contributes to an understanding of the boundedness of feminist spaces in Milan.

A second map (Figure 6.5 in Chapter 6) shows the contemporary centres, organizations and the whole sphere of women oriented civil society actors in Milan. This map, also an original map on the topic, has been realized in a more straightforward way following the addresses reported in an updated (2007) Milan Council list of women associations. The map offers a visualization of the positions of the centres in the city whose main areas are illustrated and prompts reflection on the way the associations are situated in contemporary Milan. The territorial dimension of the contemporary women's spaces in Milan is important to support the argument that the boundedness of women's spaces do not necessarily contrast with a networked and therefore unbounded kind of activity on the territory and beyond it.
As a general consideration, it is worth noting that both maps gave me the opportunity to visualize the centres in Milan, if not to exclude, to at least avoid an unnecessary focus on the gentrification process expelling women's spaces away from the city centre. Although some spaces had to move from central to more peripheral location (as it happened for instance to the Milan Bookstore collective, as I explain in Chapter 6) in the overall morphology of the city, contemporary women's spaces are located in fairly central positions or in otherwise homogeneously distributed positions within Milanese territory.

Concluding remarks

This Chapter has dealt with the methodological and epistemological engagements of my work. Hopefully I have been able to show how theoretical influences were a leading light in this process as was the perspective and the locatedness of my research questions. My reflexive practices while conducting fieldwork implied that I took into account my active presence in the field and the awareness of the fact that my own positionality inevitably contributed to shape the outcome.

I have outlined three different pillars of ethnographic research that take place in different moments in time. The phases involved in the research process, ranging from negotiating relationships in the field to data analysis and writing-up, have been outlined chronologically. Firstly, methods are tools used to capture the reality which is "out there". In my case, the main methods were participant observation, archive work and semi-structured interviews. In a second moment in time, methodology is an epistemological choice about what use to make of the methods and this includes data analysis and writing up. The third part of the Chapter has dealt with three different levels of abstraction which included working with translations, working with different temporalities and working with maps.

The making of the epistemological approach to this research project implied a set of methodological choices of what to include and what to exclude, how to craft and modify, tailor, adapt, re-work and sometimes take complex decisions as, for instance, in the selection of which data to select as case studies. If ethnography involves negotiating positions and
knowledges between researcher and researched, it is perhaps in writing up that these negotiations became most pressing and most difficult to resolve (Jupp 2006, unpublished source). It is by writing in a personal way that I tried to explain my understandings of the relationship between theoretical understanding and the “real world”, allowing ethnography and a methodologically hybrid approach to disrupt its linear construction.

This Chapter has addressed methodological issues in researching feminist spatial practices in Milan and relates to the research questions to the extent that it specifies the methods and epistemological choices made in order to unfold the research throughout the different phases of fieldwork, data-analysis and writing up. The methods and epistemological choices outlined here act as a frame for the following chapters which convey the empirical evidence in relation to the research questions posed.
Chapter 5. Geographies of subjectivity: locating feminist political subjects in Milan

This Chapter draws on how changing forms of Milanese activist women's subjectivities challenged the political and spatial order of gender relations from late 1960s onwards. By looking at subjectivity as an inclusive and complex concept, I will focus on how the political identities of the interviewees were created and changed overtime. Feminist subjectivities in Milan were shaped through the collective practice of consciousness-raising; it is firstly in this relational context that the narratives feminists established became important for defining their changing subjectivity and for giving them a sense of their identity in transformation. As will be clear in this Chapter, feminist political practices such as autocoscienza [consciousness-raising practice] represented the basis for the appropriation of both physical and institutional spaces by Milanese feminists. Here, subjectivity is understood as the result of interacting bodies in the relational space of consciousness-rising meetings where narration and hence language become the starting point for building up feminist political practices based on exclusive (separatist) relationality among women.

The underlying idea is that language does not just reflect, but also it constitutes experience and subjectivity, and hence that identities are performative, constructed and enhanced through talk. Narratives established by talk represent a starting point which will be reworked according to the work of Judith Butler (1997), Rosi Braidotti (1992), Adriana Cavarero (2000) as well as some analytic inspirations borrowed from the critical psychology school (Taylor and Wetherell 1999; Taylor 2001, 2005; Taylor and Littleton 2006; Wetherell 2008) which have been particularly concerned with the study of women's auto-biographic narratives. Whilst I will not make use of the methodological tools provided by critical psychologists on the construction of talk during interview work, I will make a selective use of critical psychologists' theoretical work focussing on a performative definition of talk and its importance for narrating practices within the Italian feminist movement.
The approach to narration in a specifically Italian feminist framework is based on Cavarero's *Relating narratives* (2000), which is an attempt to relocate the classical subject in a self who is constituted in relation to others through the practice of narrating. The narratable self is shaped by and positioned in a corporeal identity that, in Cavarero's view, can only be revealed ex-post facto through the narration of a life story from another person. Drawing on Arendt's definition of the political and public sphere (1958), Cavarero argues that the subject can only know her life story by being exposed to others. In this way, the exposure to others becomes a constitutive act contributing to an ongoing version of her subjectivity. The exposure to the other is also, at the same time, the main condition for social and political life to take place. This process raises questions about the positioning of the subject in a collective arena and about the role played by corporeal identity in public exposure.

An example of public exposure is the Milanese version of consciousness-raising practice (*autocoscienza*), where the female subject constructs her individual identity through a collective positioning within the group. So the acknowledged definition of subjectivity based on feelings, beliefs, and desires ("based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes or opinions" according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2006 edition) is re-signified through autocoscienza. Autocoscienza, as well as more contemporary experiences of self-exposure in a relational space, comprises reciprocal narration as a political practice aiming to build up a collective struggle. In this chapter, I will look at the transformative power of the feminist practice of autocoscienza through which the subjectivity of Italian feminists is constantly re-negotiated. Autocoscienza is interpreted as a political act through positioning in an interactive relational space: autocoscienza.

In processing and coding the interview material I have identified three main arguments: individual/collective, separatism and sexual difference. As the social and cultural context can represent either a resource or a constraint for the speaker (Taylor and Wetherell 1999), in Milan, difference feminism represents a contested terrain against which the identity work of the speaker normally has to take a position. The positioning of the interviewees with or against differenza sessuale reveals an existing fracture within contemporary feminism in Milan. The ongoing disagreements are not just intergenerational but are based on dissimilar perspectives concerning the work of Milan's Bookstore Collective and on wider political strategies to improve women's scarce participation in Italian politics. The next section will provide some initial
conceptual tools to help map the different positions and changing subjectivities in Milanese feminism. After that, I will look at the role of the relational space of consciousness-raising for identity construction of feminist activists through narratives. Then, I will offer a literal reading of the interview data (Manson 1996).

5.1 Mapping subjectivity transformations through narratives

Narrating assumes a political valence in Cavarero. As Paul Kottmann insightfully argues in his introduction to Relating Narratives (2000), it is helpful to situate Cavarero’s work in an intellectual tradition that uses narrative practices as a political instrument of public exhibition46. The link between the act of narrating and the value attributed to public exposition as a political act is provided by Cavarero’s distinctively Arendtian idea of the political: the ontology, that is the broad question of “what” someone is, rather than being answered within a universal and abstract philosophical discourse is revealed through narration, enabling more specific questions about what narration discloses and “who” someone actually is; that is, their uniqueness as a subject. In other words, according to Cavarero, philosophy and narration belong to different discursive registers, the former to the universality of Man, the latter to the uniqueness of the female subject. Narration as a biographical knowledge is interpreted, in Kottman’s analysis of Cavarero’s work, as a verbal response to the question about the identity of the other person and “this takes on the meaning of a political action” (2000: x). The practice of narrating is political because it establishes a relational space where “the self is constitutively exposed to the other” (2000: x).

The next section will look into the ways in which feminist subjectivity is constructed, for the Italian (and Francophone) part of the contemporary feminist debate, through corporeal existence.

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46 In a similar tradition Luisa Passerini (1991) offers a broad study on Italian women’s oral history. Starting in the mid 1970s, oral history techniques were applied to reconstruct women’s history, initially focusing on the role of antifascist women during the Italian resistance.
The Anglo-American theories that articulate the process of the formation of the subject around social, psychic and discursive resources are challenged by Cavarero's *Relating Narratives* (2000) which offers an opportunity to re-think the question of subject formation through the process of narration. As Braidotti (1992) puts it, the body is the key term in the feminist struggle for the redefinition of subjectivity; it is not just a biological and a sociological category as the Anglo-Saxon feminist disjunction between sex and gender suggests. Rather, the body is a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological. The complex and polymorphic structure of the subject reveals the capacity to transcend any given variable of sex, class, race, nationality, culture while remaining situated within them. In this way, the body comes to represent a surface of signification situated at the intersection of a factual anatomy and the symbolic dimension of language (Braidotti 1992).

For Butler (1997), the subject is Foucauldian; that is, it is constituted through micro-dynamics of pervasive power which shape the subject in a way that the world external to the subject plays an active role in constructing and reflecting forms of power which become internalized. The inwards looking projection of an already existing external source of power is thus the primary form that the process of "subjection" takes. However, "subjection" also refers to the process of becoming a subject in a way that addresses a more traditional psychoanalytic reading of the construction of the subject's identity through subordination to external, ongoing power relations. Therefore, "subjection" is the process through which the inside is constituted by its outside after power itself has assumed a psychic form through the body. In Butler (1997), the subject, rather than being identified with the individual, is designated as a "linguistic category, a place holder, a structure in formation. (...) No individual becomes a subject without undergoing subjectivation" (1997:10-11, also quoted in Kottman 2000: xiii). In Butler's words, subjectivation is the pre-condition for linguistic intelligibility.

Cavarero (2000) offers an alternative understanding to the idea that the constitution of the subject has to be understood within the register of philosophy which fails to give accounts...
of the uniqueness of the subject. Butler’s linguistic process, through which the subject becomes understandable, is replaced by the narration of that person’s life story. The subject for Cavarero, according to Arendt (1958), is not just understandable through, and established in, language (hence a linguistic category), but she is an “embodied existent” made of flesh and blood, whose material existence is revealed through the narrating words of her personal biography (Kottman 2000: x). In other words, Cavarero seeks to break the necessity of the discursive framework. Although narration cannot avoid the discursive frame, the corporeal experience of narration offers a material ground to the strictly philosophical discourse.

Another aspect of the Cavarero-Butler disagreement in this respect is Butler’s idea that a space for re-signification of the female subject is opened up by a disjunction between discourse and life (suggested by Foucault in “Politics and the study of discourse” in Burchell et al., 1991). In the space left open between life and discourse it is possible, in Butler’s view, for the female subject to gain agency as an individual by appropriating the terms in which she is addressed in order to express her autonomy (Kottman 2000). This reveals an analogy between the two philosophers, as Butler’s “being addressed to” is also a relevant part of Cavarero’s theory on narratives, in so far as the tales told from a third person about someone’s biography represent the interactive precondition for the narrative relation to take place. However, Cavarero offers a critical perspective on this disjunction: the space between discourse and life is suspended through narration and suggests that narrative relations are a political act, in so far as they demonstrate an understanding of the other person involved in the narrative interaction and they work toward a collective struggle. This acknowledgement is political, in the Arendtian sense of politics as a plural and interactive exhibition of the self (Kottmann 2000).

The symbolic dimension of the body proposed by Cavarero characterizes the Franco-Italian approach to feminist theory, where the exposition, both psychic and corporeal, through the act of narrating becomes political if a relationship based on the specific knowledge of “who” the other is, takes place. A concrete example of this process is illustrated in the next section: through the collective practice of autocoscienza, when Milanese feminists transformed narration into a political practice.

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48 See the Relating Narratives chapter entitled The necessary other on the interesting story of Gertrude’s Stein who subverts the rules of biography by writing and signing the autobiography of Alice Toklas.
5.2 Narratable selves in the relational space of autocoscienza

The history of the Milanese women’s movement is shaped by the narrating practice of autocoscienza. As Cavarero points out in the chapter entitled The outskirts of Milan (2000), in autocoscienza groups it is recognized that self narration represents a passage from the everyday of female relations to a more stable and organized form of group narration. Through the desire of expressing one’s self in the practice of autocoscienza, the typically feminine custom of self narration finds a shared and interactive scene. In autocoscienza, a relational space of mutual exhibition, which is perceived and affirmed as political, is created. As Cavarero puts it:

The insistence on the relationship between women, on the contextuality of the practice and on starting from oneself that characterized the feminist political lexicon in Italy since the 1980s finds a fundamental source in the consciousness-raising groups. Its uniqueness consists in a horizon that sees politics and narration intersect (Cavarero 2000:60).

It is precisely in the relational character of the collective space that narration becomes political: through the collective exhibition of personal experience in the time-space of autocoscienza the narratable self is constituted in relation to others. In a similar direction, Braidotti (1992) has argued for the need to define the subject as a gendered unity which is intrinsically connected to the other.

For feminism, in the beginning there is alterity, the non-one, a multiplicity. The founding agent is the common corpus of female subjects who posit themselves theoretically and politically as a collective subject (Braidotti 1992:189).

“Alterity” refers to a moment in time when “the unexposable is non existent” (2000:57) to use Cavarero’s words about the time in which, before feminism, many women in Milan and elsewhere lacked a political space. This is referred to as atopia in Chapter 6. The setting of
their lives had often been the domestic sphere, thus non-existent in political terms, unexposed and invisible. It is also a fragmented condition, as Braidotti describes it, “non-one” and multiple. The unity is given by the “passage of a rather diffuse habit in the everydayness of female relations to the relatively stable and organized form of the group” (Cavarero 2000:59) that explains Braidotti’s collective subject, originated from a “common corpus” able to elaborate theoretical and political self reflections. Here, personal and collective narratives are mutually shaped.

The kind of narration that happened in autocoscienza is also the expression of a corporeal desire: narrating women position themselves as embodied, corporeal, sexed beings and thus reject the knowing subject as universal. The practice of consciousness-raising offered them the possibility of avoiding the risk of being “unexposed” by narrating stories that gave them social identities and generated a relational political space that “exposed” them (Cavarero 2000). Again Braidotti helps to clarify this:

The positional or situated way of seeing the subject states that the most important location or situation is the rooting of the subject into the spatial frame of the body (Braidotti 1992:182).

The subject, understood as process in Braidotti (1992), includes multiple identities because it does not just coincide with consciousness (as a merely psychoanalytic interpretation of the subject would advocate). In its embodied form, the feminist subject is therefore the “site of dynamic interaction between desire and will, between subjectivity and unconscious” (182). The body, with its spatial frame, both symbolically and materially situates the feminist subject in the relational, collective and interactive space of the consciousness-raising practice. At the same time, during interviews, speakers establish narratives that have the effect of positioning them within Milanese feminism. This chapter looks at both past and present dimensions of feminist positioning in two different kinds of relational space: the collective one of autocoscienza and the more personal one that emerges from the interview.

The next section will explore the role of a politics of location and the importance for a feminist positionality as a necessary step for situating the interview material gathered during my fieldwork in Milan.
5.2.1 The bodily frame of the politics of location

Ideas about identity as a site resulting in the literature on locating identity politics in a feminist framework (Haraway 1990, Hartstock 1998, Harding 2004 among others) have been burgeoning from the 1990s. Whilst a politics of location is, for Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1992), the historical, geographical, cultural, psychic and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for a political definition of contemporary (US) feminists (1992:75), it was Adrienne Rich’s (1986) work on the politics of location which first raised the question about how to conceptualize gendered social locations and claimed the need for a spatially scaled sense of social identity. Also for Rich, like Braidotti, Butler and Cavarero, the body is the starting point, locating the grounds from which to speak with authority as women. According to Smith and Katz (1993), the politics of location is about reclaiming the body without transcending it and disrupting the imposed social mapping of identities by questioning the process through which the map of different locations is drawn. This would make it possible to acknowledge that the relationality of social relations is strictly intertwined with the relationality of geographical location.

To reinforce the view of existing interconnections between locating the body and subjectivity, Elisabeth Grosz’s (1998) states that the body should not be understood through oppositions like inside and outside, body and mind, experience and social context, but through the corporeality in its sexual specificity. This may be seen as the material condition of subjectivity; that is, the body itself may be regarded as the locus and site of inscription for specific modes of subjectivity. Liz Bondi (1993) also argues for the importance of locating identity politics; in her view, political activity and effort involves a continuous process of making and remaking ourselves and ourselves in relation to others. The existing literature about body, subjectivity and location helps to set my work within a wider theoretical framework in order to understand the links between relationality, narration and the changing subjectivity of Milan feminist activists.

One of the main aims of feminist practice is to unfold the locations of power that are intrinsic to the positionality of one’s identity. In Braidotti’s view (2002), the politics of location help to conceptualize the diversity among women within the signifier of “sexual difference”,

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which broadly represents the opposite pole of the "phallocentric subject" (males). The response to one’s material and symbolic positionality is always a relational and collective practice, and its major aim of undoing power differentials is crucially linked to both memory and narrative. While it would be misleading to engage here the broad theoretical field and literature about memory, it is significant for this work that narratives, as much as memory, “activate the process of putting into words, that is to say bringing into symbolic representation, that which by definition escapes consciousness” (Braidotti 2002:12).

The mediation offered through language already reflects the subject’s positioning. Moreover, a subject’s location is physically situated in a spatial and temporal frame, in a specific territory which is collective, shared and jointly constructed (Braidotti 2002). As I have shown above, autocoscienza was a practice that presupposed the presence of others to reach the political awareness necessary for the politics of location to take place, as it required a critical view on the self, an understanding of genealogical issues in feminism and an autobiographic participation through self-narratives. All this contributes towards a politics of location as relational and shows different power positions aimed at transforming the self and the external world (Braidotti 2002). The politics of location at stake in autocoscienza represented a shift from unconscious to conscious through political awareness.

The epistemologies of feminism spring from interactive processes and the aim of past and contemporary political practices is to shape a distinctively feminist knowledge to respond to the ways in which external challenges influence the formation of the subject and vice versa. The body plays a relevant role in this process, as it represents the material and symbolic interface through which the internal and the external mutually constitute each other. In Braidotti’s words:

Feminist knowledge is an interactive process that brings out aspects of our existence, especially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before. In Deleuzian language, it “de-territorializes” us: it estranges us from the familiar, the intimate, the known, and casts an external light upon it; in Foucault’s language, it is micro-politics, and it starts with the embodied self. Feminists, however, knew this well before either Foucault or Deleuze theorized it in their philosophy (Braidotti 2002:13).

49 For instance, as Braidotti points out when discussing the politics of location, “black women’s texts and experiences make white women see the limitations of our locations, truth and discourses” (2002: 13).
The “aspects of our existence” and “our own implication” with power are mediated by the spatial frame of the body. As Braidotti suggests, it is worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari ([1972]1983) and Foucault (1977) share similar views about the existing dialectics between the embodied self and external power relations, although they give them different names. In feminist politics, narrating practices add a necessary starting point which allows the politics of location to take place.

During the interview work in Milan, the free expression of the speakers’ identities is sometimes limited by the need to situate themselves politically through the narratives they establish. From the interview material emerges the fact that the speakers often use a common language consisting of established interconnections, similar narratives, meanings and associations. As will become clear in the next section, I have grouped them in themes that are helpful for situating changing subjectivities and different standpoints in Milanese feminism.

5.3 Voices from Milanese feminist activism

The interviewees in my work are both feminist activists and managers of women’s organizations, but for the kind of analysis carried out in this particular Chapter concerning the political subjectivity of Milanese feminists, only the interviews with the activists are taken into account. As women organizations’ managers do not necessarily position themselves in continuity - and sometimes not even in relation - to the 1970s movement, it is difficult to retrieve from their interviews any set of data about the shifting subjectivity within the Milanese women’s movement over time. Women’s organizations’ managers do, however, pursue trajectories and share objectives which overlap with interests in improving the scarce political representation for Italian women, social inclusion, and women’s empowerment in the workplace, gender mainstreaming and other policies oriented to equal opportunities. For this main reason the interview data by the organizations’ leaders will be used in the next chapters, while in the current Chapter the focus will be on Milanese feminist activists whose interviews provide insights on the evolution of feminist subjectivity.

Almost every 1970s activist who accepted to be interviewed maintains an active role in contemporary Milan’s feminist politics within established political groups. Among the feminist
activists interviewed, there is an intergenerational gap; younger activists are at times in
dialogue with their predecessors and at other times are placed in a critical position to them.
They question continuity and are keen on the existing differences even though they sometimes
actualize older debates by bringing to public attention the problems that contemporary women
face. However, the question of precarious working conditions in the contemporary labour
market is at the centre of intergenerational communication problems. Other contested fields of
difficult intergenerational communication concern a political vocabulary that has changed
overtime, new ways of belonging to a collective dimension of political action, and more flexible
ways of addressing issues of separatism.

The activists I interviewed are academics and non academics who used to be radical
feminists in the 1970s and still advocate differenza and experiment with differenza-orientated
pedagogic approaches; they comprise Milan bookstore activists, film experts who used to be
militant in the 1970s still active in feminist contemporary debates, ex-feminist squatters, lesbian
separatists, Milanese feminism celebrities, members of younger feminist groups who fight
against precarity in the workplaces and feminist academics in their 30s. All these different
identities often intersect and overlap in a variety of ways. With most of these interviewees I had
pre-existing personal contacts and much of the networking has been created through word of
mouth, thanks to my specific subject position as both new outsider and former insider to the
Milanese feminist scene. My common background with the interviewees and my position of a
researcher based abroad raised both enthusiasm and willingness to share their thoughts,
experiences and sometimes feelings.

During the fieldwork, the speakers, in the accounts of their experiences, used two
different levels of narrative communication to establish relational links with the interviewer: the
first to make sense of their own experiences, the second to offer a sophisticated reply to the
interviewee’s questions (Taylor and Wetherell 1999). In managing the data (transcribing and
translating) it became clear that often the spoken language of the interviewees echoed in each
other’s language in terms of the rhetoric they used and their choice of vocabulary.

I have identified three different themes in the interview material, using cross-sectional
indexing across fifteen interviews with feminist activists in Milan. While coding the

50 A recent special issue of Feminist Review (2007, volume 87) was entirely dedicated to Italian feminism and
collectively edited by some of the interviewees who also contributed to my fieldwork in Milan.
transcriptions, I focused on a literal reading of the available interview data that involves looking at the form, content, structure and style across the semi-structured interviews (Mason 1996).

5.3.1 Individual/collective and personal/political

The first theme links the two parallel dichotomies of individual/collective and personal/political. Both individual/collective and personal/political themes recall the shift from the 1970s up to today. Speakers explicitly engaged with the personal/political issue as part of a specific question during the interviews conducted with older and younger feminist activists in Milan. However, the other correlated aspect—individual/collective, emerged as a clear and recurrent pattern in interview talks.

Women organized as collective actors in Milan had two different settings to express their changing subjectivities: the first and earlier one was the setting of the movement and the second, more contemporary in its purposes and outcomes, is the setting of the networks. In the interview material, the shift in women’s subjectivity is explicitly identified by the speakers with the shift from a collective struggle structured through a social movement (typical of the 1970s activism) to the contemporary domain which is described as more individual, as the next extract shows:

Int 5 Ext 1

In my opinion, the political subjectivity in the new millennium has to deal with the new forms of biographical construction, which are very much connected to a focus on biographical individualization. This is a trajectory that is sometimes defined, especially in international literature, as post-traditional; in other words, one which abandons the old forms of movement in Italy during the so-called long season of movements from the late 1960s through the whole of the 1970s. This also means an increased mobility and volatility of groups and associations which are less connected to standardized ways of relation-building. In this sense, I find that there are new areas where subjectivity is elaborated and which are different from those of the 1970s, also as a result of a shift in priorities, let’s say all those dimensions which are evaluated as priorities at a collective level. So, if in the 1970s the construction of a relation between the transformation of private life and political questions was obviously of central importance for the women’s movements, today the problem is no longer the construction of a politics with a capital P but to understand the ways in which these political ambitions are disseminated in everyday life, which is no longer conceived as a big movement issue but a domain where individuals are able to build/create their subjectivities.
This speaker explicitly engages with the question of political subjectivity for feminists and addresses the importance of biographical aspects for the construction of a mutated form of political subjectivity. If leaving behind the old forms of movement, on the one hand, meant an increased mobility, and as a result of which groups and associations are more volatile, on the other hand, the priorities have changed. In the 1970s, the priority of the feminist movement was to create a link between private life and a kind politics with the capital P whereas, today, these priorities have changed and it is far more important to build more concrete political issues into everyday life which is the dimension where women concretely negotiate their changed subjectivity as will become clear in Chapter 7.

Another difference between the 1970s and today that comes out from the above extract is that, today, people understand their lives predominantly in an individual sense, in contrast to the 1970s when they understood themselves primarily as a social category where the identification with the collective was stronger, as was a sense of loyalty to the group. The concepts of individual and collective are difficult to situate in a clear-cut way in the two periods at stake but from the above interviewee's talk they seem to be in tension.

As opposed to a networked form of relationality (that I will illustrate later), the issue of identification as a distinctive feature of the movement's relationality during the 1970s becomes clear in the next interview:

**Int 7 Ext 2**

*After starting out in the Manifesto collective I continued to identify with this collective as I told you earlier, that used to gather on Fridays bringing together a range of Milanese collectives, scattered people and autocoscienza groups.*

Here the speaker describes how it was important for her to belong to a collective and uses the term “identify”. She also mentions autocoscienza groups, which I have noted above and in Chapter 2, recalling the fact that, in 1970s Milan autocoscienza was a social space acknowledging women’s personal differences. “Identification” is thus what connects the individual to the collective.

According to Bono and Kemp (1990), autocoscienza was the practice which turned Italian feminism into a mass movement in the 1970s. Moreover, as suggested in the above extract, autocoscienza was considered as a preliminary feminist strategy which did not have, in
itself, the strength to change historical circumstances and women's reality in Milan. Yet, it raised awareness and therefore anger (Martucci 2008). As I have suggested above, autocoscienza played a central role in providing the women's movement with a collective corpus that shaped the feminist movement in its first expression.

Two other extracts from the interview material convey the central importance of autocoscienza practice for the Milanese feminist movement, emphasizing the life changing power of it:

Int 7 Ext 1
My great luck was that at that time in Milan, the collectives, the first autocoscianza groups and all the other things we associate with the feminist movement, started to get organized. I began attending the Manifesto collective which then was a political party and a newspaper, I started taking part in autocoscienza collectives and I have no doubts on the fact that what happened in my relation to those women changed my life.

Int 1 Ext 3
When I went to the feminist meeting in Pinarella I realized that there was something which could have changed radically in my life but also in society, I could feel it very strongly that my points of reference were absolutely insignificant in the face of the strength that these women were expressing: they were the most radical soul of the movement and they were older than me.

The first autocoscienza groups are classified by the former speaker as one of the main activities among other forms of collectives typical of the feminist movement. What emerges also from the latter speaker is the life-changing impact that the initial feminist mobilizations and new ways of relating to other women had on the speakers' lives. In particular, in Int 1 Ext 3 the speaker traces a parallel between the impact that feminism had on her own life as well as on society, because the "points of reference" that she always used to frame the world had irreversibly changed, and the expectation was that the same would have happened in society too. Moreover, she feels that her own points of reference are "insignificant" as if she was less powerful as an individual in comparison to the "strength" that the nascent 1970s women's movement was expressing in a collective gathering in Pinarella. The shift from personal/political, from individual to the collective lifestyle provided by the feminist movement was life-changing for the two speakers.
The next interviewee establishes a narrative that also addresses the life-changing character of her experience of feminism. Like the speaker of Int 1 Ext 3, she uses the expression “points of reference” in lines 2-3:

**Int 12 Ext 1**

Feminism has been the greatest adventure of my life. Not the greatest experience, but without a doubt the greatest adventure. To me it was like shifting the points of reference from Man to Woman and freeing myself of the discomfort and the loss I was experiencing at that moment. All started when I met a woman from the bookstore, which I had heard about in the newspapers during the summer of 1977. After meeting this woman, for 6 months I thought about it and then I started volunteering at the bookshop. This woman also introduced me to the collective which happened to be the last autocoscienza group. This took place in private houses, including my own, which were made available through acquaintances or friends. Hearing other women speak was liberating and consolatory and through the autocoscienza group I learned how to recount (literal translation: “start from myself”, [partire da me]) and say things from a personal level.

This speaker describes the experience of feminism as a revolution of thinking paradigms. From the first, shy approach to the group which she had heard about through a newspaper, she gets involved in an autocoscienza group and the level of engagement increases until to the point that she makes her own house available for the autocoscienza group to meet. The last part of this extract, in particular, emphasises the freeing power of narration: “to hear other women speaking set me free” as she could recognize herself in the other woman and thus feel consoled. The relational space of autocoscienza favoured collective personal stories and also encouraged those women who took part in it to actually “start from themselves” when narrating [partire da se’], a concept that has some evident links with the politics of location (see subheading 2.1 in this Chapter).

The speaker of interview 12 Ext 1 recalls an important fact which was a characteristic of Milanese radical feminism, that often the meetings and the autocoscienza practices happened in private houses, not in public places. In Milan, the geography of the feminist movement was strictly delimited to private houses used for collective purposes made available by the activists. Also collectives such as Cherubini and Mancinelli were hybrid spaces as I will make clear in Chapter 6 and their mixed private/public dimension is well illustrated by the fact that they took the name of the streets in which they were situated.
Autocoscienza practice represented the shift from individual to collective through personal narratives whose contents could "set [other women] free" (line 9 Ext 1 Int 12) and at the same time take the first step towards women’s separatism. As this speaker recalls, feminist practices such as autocoscienza helped feminists to take a separate stance from the students’ and workers’ movement in Milan:

**Int 1 Ext 2**
There was this dissident group so in 1975 we left Avanguardia Operaia. We were all women except for a homosexual man. We arranged a meeting with the politburo of Avanguardia Operaia to discuss our position, explaining that we no longer agreed with their agenda. They welcomed the fact that we were leaving the group because we were not looked upon upon in a positive light, what with our ideas of separatism and our considering subjective problems as political problems. Moreover, our emphasis on the so-called “crisis of militancy” wasn’t really accepted.

The dissidence from Avanguardia Operaia was a collective choice and, interestingly, the speaker uses the pronoun “we” to address the idea that separatism and the new way to approach female subjectivity generated a conflict with the rest of the (male) movement. The theme of the personal/political comes as something which is not understood or even opposed by the male comrades.

Another aspect that was not acknowledged by the rest of the 1968 movement was the feminist elaboration of the idea of the “crisis of militancy”; that is the fact that women, ironically, also in revolutionary militancy, as well as in the post-war Italian socio-cultural setting discussed in Chapter 2, had to face a double burden: as feminists they were committed to feminist practices and modes of (separatist) political action and, also, actively committed to the aims and initiatives of the 1968 movement.

The next speaker establishes a long narrative around the concept of personal/political:

**Int 6 Ext 5**
Regarding your previous question, I think it's important to underline that the moment was anti-institutional, in other words it had shifted the attention of the men/woman relation outside the public sphere. This wasn’t an argument about the marginalization, disadvantage and under-representation of women in the public sphere but rather the movement shift the attention

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51 Avanguardia Operaia (AO) was a communist extra parliamentary group, created in Milan around 1968 by workers, Leninist militants, organized trade unionists, student committees and scholars connected to workers (Pozzi 2007).
onto a terrain that politics never considered as its own. It moved towards an “elsewhere”: the home, family, body and sexuality. Problems related to the body had never been considered by institutional politics because they were assigned to an ahistorical area such as the family or patriarchy, or the sacred realm of the church. Feminism was therefore the first movement to give secularity to these different domains and to turn them into objects of its analysis, starting with the extraordinary intuition that sexuality was the field that assigned the private sphere to women but also to the body, maternity and the whole idea of the continuity of human species, history and public life. We were thus exploring the least political area and the one most far removed from institutions and public life. This also implied the invention of political practices, when I speak about “unspeakable viscerality” I mean this pre-history resides in lives, in personal histories. When we said “the personal is political” we meant that in personal life stories there is a non-written story, which contained a treasure of culture connected to the existential experiences of human kind such as birth, love, death, loneliness, old age. By exploring this terrain [here the speaker uses a metaphor that I could paraphrase as “digging this terrain”] we not only thought about producing personal modifications but we believed we could modify the outside as well. The latter hasn’t been so easy. When at the end of the 1970s feminism entered universities, professions, research projects and political parties it became obvious that it was very difficult to alter some of the historical, rooted structures, which had been erected through the cancellation and estrangement of women, the body and sexuality from public life. Altering them at the time really meant revolution. It has been a long and winding path to get to today.

This narrative offers an interesting and unusual perspective on what is normally read as an integration of women’s issues in the public sphere. On the contrary, this speaker prefers to look at it as a sort of switch that, from the description, is easy to imagine as just a different frame when choosing to take a picture using a camera. In her idea of the “anti-institutional” character of feminist politics there is the fact that what happened was not the integration of certain controversial women’s issues like sexuality into a pre-existing frame (the public) but that the framing itself had changed. The new, different picture was nevertheless as important even if, before that time, nobody had ever thought about taking that picture. It is exactly “the terrain that politics never considered as its own” that suddenly becomes important and the “elsewhere to politics” (such as home, family, interpersonal relations, body sexuality) gets attention and people start interrogating those domains. As the speaker makes clear, before this very moment these domains (home, family, body and sexuality) were “ahistorical” because they were situated in almost archetypical areas of human history such as the family, patriarchy and the sacred realm of the church.

As the above speaker argues, feminism “secularized” the arenas of the home, family, body and sexuality, previously made sacred by the Catholic Church, by recognizing that
women for centuries had been segregated in the private sphere, where women's bodies, associated with maternity, reproduction and so on, belonged. They were marginalized from the "Political" with a capital P, consisting of public life and institutions. The political practices that were invented by second-wave feminists helped to refocus this process of exclusion and bring back to political life "the pre-history residing in personal life stories". Because personal life stories and narratives are predominantly oral, thus non-written, it does not mean that they are less important; on the contrary they represent a "treasure of culture connected to the existential facts of human kind such as birth, love, death, loneliness, old age" (line 19 of the above extract).

The interviewee uses the metaphor of digging a terrain (the personal sphere) as a symbol of reworking ideas through political practices and argues that the expected outcomes from this work were high: a modification of the personal sphere and of the outside as well, but concludes by admitting that the latter objective has not been fully met, and that evolving to the contemporary situation has been hard work. The contemporary situation sounds different in many ways. As far as the collective dimension of the political is concerned, the level of engagement still seems to be strong but the form of belonging to groups and collectives seems to be less bounded and less binding.

The next two speakers make this last point by describing new forms of belonging as "multiple":

**Int 2 Ext 3**

Something that I make use of is the multiple belonging of each of us, for instance I belong to other groups as well (...). So each of us keeps developing and carries with her a baggage of political relations.

**Int 10 Ext 3**

This thing about multiple belonging, to identify with and to belong, well I don't want to do any sophisms but we state in our article that all these queer subjectivities, different genders, different belonging or sexual orientations that we find in Italy and elsewhere in Europe (which also sometimes come from different parts of the world) we think that all of them have multiple belongings where the element of work with politics, with activism, with learning, with individual knowledges overlap on a local/national/transnational level and so forth. I feel I belong to any of these realities. I do belong but it's a kind of fluid belonging if we want to say these things but I don't identify with any of these activities, I think that any of those things can go ahead without me and I myself can go ahead without any of these things in the evolution of the path.
"Multiple belonging" is a kind of transversal belonging, as speaker in Int 2 Ext 3 makes clear; she belongs to a group but like the other members of it, she belongs to other groups as well and this enriches the range of political relations that they, as individuals and as part of (more) groups, can develop. The speaker of Int 10 Ext 3 seems to be commenting on a pre-existing rhetoric, the one of "multiple belonging" that her group seems to have discussed several times and even written about.

The second speaker seeks to address the multiple belonging at a geographic level (local, national, transnational) when she explains that there is a multiplicity of different subjectivities whose sexual identities are multifaceted and not necessarily fixed or bonded to a place. She claims to feel a sense of belonging for all the activities she takes part in, but underlines that identifying is different from belonging, as belonging leaves her freer to be part of more than one activity without necessarily having to identify with each of them.

What is remarkable about this younger feminist group is that, although they show a stronger sense of the individual positioning within the collective when compared to their predecessors, they practice collective writing and publish collectively written papers. This clash of collective and individual ways of conceiving political practices exemplifies well the contemporary modes of feminist political action in Milan put forward by younger activists.

From this set of interviews it emerges that, by comparing the 1970s with contemporary forms of activism, the kind of commitment involved in participating in a group have changed. The feelings of identification with the group created the initial bond among feminists; through a feeling of identification they could mirror themselves in each other and find out that their imagined neuroses and oppression were a shared condition in 1970s Italy. Identifying with other women in the collective space of autocoscienza gave them the strength to elaborate their personal experiences through narration. The freeing experience of narration created a strong bond in autocoscienza groups and favoured the initial phase of sisterhood among women, although this phase soon broke up after the acknowledgement of the existing differences and disparities among women. The feeling of identification with the collective finds an echo in the political discourse of the time and it is relevant therefore to depict how it has evolved into more contemporary, less binding feelings of belonging.

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52 A full account of the shift from identification to disparity is resumed in The Bookstore Collective's Sottosopra Verde (1983) and Martucci (2008).
As emerged in the interviews, contemporary belonging still implies engaging with the group but in a way that does not preclude other choices or orientations. This is strictly connected to the "polymorphic biography construction" of younger activists that the Int 2 Exct 3 refers to. In this sense, Milanese feminists’ subjectivity has changed radically, although the themes remain rigid as they recall each other in the vocabulary used, the rhetoric deployed by the speakers and what contemporary feminists in Milan think are the key areas of past and present debates about individual/collective and personal/political. From the analysis of the interview extracts, it is clear that the social movement setting of feminist subjectivity in the 1970s is radically different from the less bounded, networked setting of contemporary relationality.

5.3.2 Separatism

The second theme I identified by cross-sectional indexing of the semi-structured interviews with two generations of Milanese feminist activists is the one of separatism. As is suggested from the interview extracts, the need to redefine women’s position in a changing society and the opposition to institutional politics which characterized 1970s Italian feminism justified the need for separatist politics and the distinctive psychoanalytical approach in their political practices. In the interview material sometimes the interviewees position themselves in favour of separatism, but to be more precise, they say they are not separatist but integrate separatist practices into their political activity. While in the 1970s phase of the definition of their identity, separatism was a necessary step to be able to understand and explore their subjectivities away from male influence, today the positions seem to have changed. In the way in which it was theorized in Italy, separatism does not simply imply a withdrawal from and a refusal of relationships with men, including sexual relationships, but rather the existence of separate spaces of theoretical production and political action (Bono and Kemp 1989).

According to Calabro’ and Grasso (2004), if at first separatism was a place for transgression, to affirm separate feminist identities, other than the masculine ones, and to reject the historically acknowledged identity of women. Today it has become a place where strategies are elaborated to access the political sphere and the labour market. The relationship
with the “outside” has changed and the newly established groups, rather than expressing antagonism, desire a form of integration which does not abandon sexual difference. Separatism does not mediate sexual difference, but rather offers it as a resource (Calabro’ and Grasso 2004).

The next speaker addresses the shocking effect of female separatism on average Italian heterosexual couples during the 1970s:

**Int 6 Ext 1**

Nowadays separatism is normal and even the limits of it start getting clear, men start to pop in and nobody says anything but at the time separatism had a huge strength it was a deep revolution of thinking paradigms. That is it broke the thinking paradigms that made us dependant on men in the sense of a gaze that it seemed we needed in some ways. When people say that women are alone without men this has effective psychological consequences. That is the feminine without the gaze which historically built it, it feels lonely. In particular I remember a Bolognese woman who said that her boyfriend told her: well, if you are autonomous I split up with you. Anyway it was that partners and husbands didn’t welcome in a relaxed way the fact that women wanted to meet up on their own and what was hitting their imagination during that start of feminism was that women alone were debating about body, sexuality… what are they talking about? What kind of sexuality will they want, those women who lament that their body and their sexuality has been cancelled?

The revolution of thinking paradigms that the speaker refers to, in her optimistic attitude, broke the dependency on the gaze of the man that women seemed to be so dependant upon until that moment in time. The practice of separatism left Italian men wondering what the hidden desires that women wanted to discuss separately were, and it brought about a sense of inadequacy in them.

Separatism is defined as a “normal” practice for contemporary modes of Italian women’s politics and there is an increasing awareness about its limits, therefore it is now used more selectively as the next speaker points out:

**Int 7 Ext 5**

The intergenerational thinking among women still needs forms of separatism. There is still highhandedness (sometimes involuntary) in the male presence that makes it difficult for us to do this. In fact, when we have our annual meeting in Tuscany in September, we meet in separate groups according to sex. I have recently read a 1970s document about separatism on “Il lessico politico delle donne”. The definition of it is a “temporary strategy”. So it was clear even then. I consider separatism a temporary strategy connected to particular moments. But we still need it or may be we will always need it or may be it just pleases us so much that it’s good to
do it. Of course when we group separately, and later we meet up with men our level of conflict rises because we [women] are much more belligerent...they [men] fight quite a lot among themselves when they meet separately and they have less of a generational argument because they are really the first generation that has started to think reflexively in a gender perspective in a committed way, the conflict rises a little bit but we reinforce ourselves though those meetings.

The extract above is rather dense and deals with different complex topics, one of them being the intergenerational thinking among two different generations of feminisms. Another is the attempt by two different generations of feminists to debate with the first generation of men, who, at the same time, are interrogating themselves about the displacement of gender roles due to the changed subjectivity of women. While establishing this complex narrative, the speaker is also reflecting on separatism and comparing its first definition with the contemporary sense of it.

Separatism, in the Italian sense, was defined by a book called Lessico politico delle donne (2002) as a temporary strategy. But, as the speaker points out, she also ponders whether separatism is still needed, especially when dealing with a specific issue such as intergenerational thinking. In the example the speaker gives, there is an experimental confrontation with a group of Italian men that a Milanese feminist group undertakes yearly in Tuscany. The speaker notices that during the meetings separated by sex, men find it difficult and they fight. This seems obvious to the speaker as they are the first generation of Italian men to interrogate themselves about these topics. Women instead, because they know the practice of separatism and find it empowering, when they attend the joint meeting are “more belligerent”.

As emerges from this interview, today separatism is different because it allows a confrontation, a debate, with men although it is still necessary. As the speaker says, “may be we will always need it”. However, the practices and the modes of separatism have turned into a more inclusive debate; they are not the old form of absolute, totalizing female separatism anymore.

The next speaker addresses the inclusiveness of her group which is a “closed group”, that is no new people are allowed to join the existing members (six women in their 30s):
Int 2 Ext 2
When there was a break in the group one of the reasons was the question of being an open group or a closed group, we expressed the need of knowing who you are with, that is being just us 5-6-7 people because it's a safe space, [name of the group] for me it is a time/space which I defend with my nails and teeth, I might have a lot of work to do but if there is a meeting I try to go because it's a moment in which I decompress and have a political confrontation with the others about everything that happens to you, it's therefore a significant moment. We chose not to transform it into a network or into an open group because this implies having to re-negotiate each time all that among us can be taken for granted. But the fact that new people cannot participate doesn't make me feel as if we are a closed group because we have relations with three thousand individuals and different groups. A closed group doesn't preclude the construction of networks.

This is a particular kind of separatism; it is separate not just from men but from other women too. It has small group features, where members have a "political confrontation about everything that happens to you": it sounds as if they actualize the old motto about the personal being political, so that what happens is made political through the confrontation with the small collective. But this process also recalls the political exposure through narration noted earlier. What creates the bond between members is the fact that they know each other well and therefore it is a safe space where they do not have to continually renegotiate their position.

The individual dimension here is emphasised because outside the closure of the political group, its members are in contact with many other groups, so they are in a network and the group seems to be one of the hubs of that network. Here the theme of separatism appears to have different features in the setting of the 1970s feminist movement from those in the contemporary networked space of political activism.

In the following extracts, the speakers do not identify themselves as separatist but from what they say it seems as if they are, in a more contemporary way.

Int 11 Ext 1
According to the way we are working at the moment, the space has importance that is we meet, as a matter of choice, in a separatist space that is the CDM (Collettivo Donne Milanesi), a space where the CDM group meets. It is a collective space where also other women's groups meet. We are not separatist in the practices, our separatism consists of this: we organize the events/initiatives, we decide the modalities and the leadership belongs to women. If men want to participate, they can but they have to recognize us as the leadership. So the organization is all ours like at tomorrow's conference which is open to men but the speakers are all women as a matter of choice.
In t2 Ext 5
We are not separatist but we claim a separate space of political reworking, we realized that before we enter into mixed contexts of the world what we really need is a fundamental moment of confrontation only among women because it’s different. For instance, in every initiative we propose we do invite men but they could never be part of our group.

The first speaker makes it a question of leadership. The second one advances what seems to be a paradox by saying that her group is not separatist but reclaims a separate space of political reworking, on the basis that being among women is different. However, they do invite men to the events and conferences they organize so there is an opening, if compared to older forms of more radical separatism, but men are still kept far from the core of the group’s work. New forms of separatism, where men are invited but excluded from the leadership of projects, events, conferences or political meetings, show that older forms of radical separatism have changed and that the modes of separatism in contemporary Milan are more selective.

5.3.3 With or against difference feminism

A third theme is identified in the positioning of the speakers towards sexual difference. The formulation of the theory of sexual difference by the Milan Bookstore Collective largely draws on Irigaray (1974, 1984, 1990) and has been publishing on sexual difference over the last three decades through the work of the philosophical community Diotima in Verona (1987)53, whose theoretical insights are given in Chapter 2.

In this section, the qualitative analysis focussing on content seeks to map out the positionality suggested by the speakers to provide a literal interpretation of it. In interviews, talk is involved in the process of representation of the self that carries upon it the traces of the “other” (Taylor 2006). So identity, and also subjectivity if we agree to shift the theoretical margins of the definition of identity as suggested by Wetherell 2008), is never “essential”, but

53The concept of difference has been at the core of postructuralist theories over the last thirty years. It has been approached from different theoretical perspectives and for instance Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and later Braidotti (2002) have reworked it in terms of nomadic subjects, Foucalut (see Trainor 2003) in terms of micro-physics of power, Lacan (see Butler, Laclau and Zizek 2000) have theorized the constitutive character of difference according to the logic of signifier and Derrida (1973) has called it “differance”.

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the product of ongoing relationships negotiated in talk (Taylor 2006). However, the Milan Bookstore Collective’s interpretation of differenza sessuale is highly contested and from the interview material it emerged that most of the speakers felt the need to situate themselves with or against differenza sessuale as an imaginary boundary of Milanese feminists’ positioning.

As the work of critical psychologists shows (Taylor and Wetherell 1999), personal narratives can be fully or in part shaped by collectively held narratives, and this is particularly true when speakers make use of a common language and recognizable narratives. Both a common language and recognizable narratives are present in the interview material and are the outcome of collectively elaborated concepts. Here the positioning of the speaker with or against the theoretical field of sexual difference emerges from most of the interviews, often without an explicit prompt by the interviewer. This process confirms Taylor’s (2006) view that talk is not just an interaction with another person, but “takes place on several levels simultaneously as speakers also respond to imagined or previously experienced audiences and criticisms” (2006:25).

**Int 2 Ext9**
The Milan Bookstore Collective is a very difficult area for me, last year we met at a camping place with the younger branch of the group [the Milan Bookstore Collective group] to confront our so called labels and belonging, that is let’s meet and let’s talk about it. Among us there is a relational specificity which is coming out quite clearly. Let’s try to compare our positions. In that occasion I realized that the kind of language they use is very strong and they seek to group reality under their own categories so for instance [name] for us has played important role because it’s the person who introduced the members of the group to each other but we are far from dubbing her “symbolical mother”. The positive aspect of it is that we as younger feminists identified these differences and discussed them. I find it difficult to understand their language [the other group’s] but it’s stimulating to understand what their reading of the world is.

This speaker is part of a group celebrated by the current Italian debates as the younger generation of feminists. They are in their early and mid-30s and define themselves as the third-wave generation. They are the most directly involved in the intergenerational confrontation with older activists, but in the above quote the speaker addresses in terms of different “labels” and “belonging” the political perspectives of the younger bunch of Libreria delle Donne activists and those of her group. In the narrative she establishes, the interviewee makes use of rhetoric such as “relational specificity” meaning that, notwithstanding the divergent political positioning, they still want to meet and talk with the younger Milan Bookstore Collective activists.
The problems that emerged in the political confrontation among younger activists are about the language inspired by the Milan Bookstore Collective that the speaker finds obsolete, because it appears too strong and outdated. She thinks that the Libreria's younger women simplify reality thorough interpretative categories that she does not share. She provides an example of the exaggeration of calling "symbolic mother" the person who facilitated and introduced the members of her group. However, after having underlined the main differences, she still declares herself as open to communicate and understand their positions:

**Int 2 Ext 10**

With the historical feminists such as [name] and [name] my experience is that I go to some of their debates because they are anyway very stimulating, but every time I disagree and cannot make interventions in that place, there is too much of an emphasis on the so called "maestre" [in Italian, feminine of masters] who are just two and all the rest are learners where there is a submissive kind of relation. I often felt that there were knots but I never got to speak aloud and say "hey, I see it in a different way" so the Libreria is mirroring these kinds of social relations based on knowledge gaps. So this is a place, that of the Libreria, that fascinates me and repels me at the same time (...). Anyway I recognize the Libreria as one of the few public political places in Milan because for instance a place such as Unione Femminile is closer. A library has obviously more people around it.

This extract shows the ambivalent relation with the kind of sociality that takes place in the Bookstore Collective's meetings and public debates. The speaker feels she is constrained in expressing her ideas and disagreements because she feels the social relationships at the Milan Bookstore Collectives are structured hierarchically and this vertically shaped form of feminine authority is not something that she feels comfortable with. The "knowledge gaps" among women that the Libreria is deliberately structured on, create ambivalent feelings such as fascination and repulsion in the speaker. She nevertheless recognizes the central role of the Libreria as a public place for the creation and circulation of feminist ideas in Milan.

The next speaker clearly maps out the contrasting factions in Milan's contemporary feminism.

**Int 7 Ext 3**

The places that, in Milan, are movement places are the Milan Bookstore Collective and the LUD (Libera Universita' delle Donne). I attend the second one, I'm not part of it but I attend it and I teach courses in there. It has been quite a natural choice because it seems to be the kind
of space that is closer to the 1970s kind of feminism so the one I feel more bounded to, the one which shaped me, the feminism of the personal faith to one's self, the so called starting from oneself that has, in my opinion, been betrayed by the thought of sexual difference. The theory of sexual difference has given an extraordinary contribution [to feminism] and none of us could live without it today. But it has been betrayed by a series of practices, it has been structured as a kind of knowledge that has itself a lot of disciplinary features and also a series of political positionings which I don't share (...) a strong hegemonic demand, clearly acknowledged: the practice of affidamento about the dual relationship between women.

This speaker clearly defines the map of differently oriented radical feminisms in Milan, which she defines as "movement places". On one hand there is the Milan Bookstore Collective, on the other hand, the LUD. She positions herself as being more oriented to the latter, making a distinction between belonging as "being part of" and the practice of leading activities there. So this positioning does not suggest a full identification and it strongly contrasts to where, in Interview 7 Extract 2, the same speaker uses the term "identify" referring to her participation in a feminist collective in the 1970s.

In this extract, she refers to her bond with a kind of 1970s feminism which seems, in her view, better represented in the political practices of the LUD. The theory of sexual difference is in her opinion betrayed by the political practices of the Milan Libreria, in particular from the affidamento practice (see footnote 18 in Chapter 2).

The position of the Libreria carries with it some important responsibilities:

**Int 7 Ext 4**
This specific position, this difficulty to access a thought that uses a complex language is strongly biased and difficult to understand from the outside of a restricted niche. All this has kept younger women far away and women who had intellectual tools but didn't want to accept this uncritically as in fact it happened. In my opinion, there are responsibilities in the lack of development of the movement which have to be found in this hegemonic form of thought.

The difficulty to access the complex language of sexual difference is surely a shared problem among the speakers. This particular speaker points to the responsibilities of the Milan Libreria for using this kind of hermetic language that segregates the valuable thought of sexual difference in an intellectual niche without making it available for everyone. Moreover, a not very inclusive language kept the younger women away from feminism so that even those who actually have the intellectual tools to access it decided not to conform to the hegemonic form of thought proposed by the Milan Libreria.
These responsibilities towards younger generations also extend to the field of politics:

**Int 7 Ext 5**
And then there is a...and this belongs to the Italian and the French debate, there is this issue which is complicated but has been crucial for many of our defeats which is the absolute separatism and disrepute that the thought of sexual difference threw on the equal opportunity politics. I have never been a supporter of equal opportunity because I always thought they need a better theorizing and not to assume a mechanism which they had in other countries. But anyway to create a separation and a stigmatization of equal opportunity and all what could happen with women and for women within the institutions has hindered the development of opportunities that instead other countries have had. Even recently there has been article on Viadogana [the Libreria delle Donne magazine] against equal opportunities. Again, it's such a repetition it doesn't say anything new and this surprised me because it has refocused a range of responsibilities that these women belonging to that part of the movement had, in a lack of development of feminine political representation in a range of institutions and also a very difficult intergenerational communication. In fact young women have for a long time kept far away from the movement. Now it's a good moment in which groups and collectives are re-flourishing but in a position which is sometimes opposing very much the two generations of feminism. It's kind of obvious that this happens; the problem is that there isn't enough communication between the two different generations of women, there is a whole branch of these “great mothers” who need to feel they are the owners of the spoken word in order to recognize the ineluctable difference of younger feminists.

The speaker above identifies the lack of institutional political representation for women as a defeat for feminism in Italy and attributes the responsibility for it to the influx of sexual difference ideas and practices in the dispute over equal opportunity policies. She is aware of the limits of equal opportunity policies, in the way that they are implemented in Italy, but thinks it is wrong to create a stigmatization of them as it has hindered the development of women's political representation. 

The speaker also mentions an article which recently appeared in Viadogana (2007/80) - the Milan Bookstore Collective magazine - as an occasion to rethink the responsibility that the policies of the Libreria had in the lack of development of women's political representation in Italy and also in the difficult intergenerational communication. Although new groups are re-flourishing at the moment, they are obviously very distant from the “great mothers” who, in the view of the speaker, need to feel that they are the exclusive owners of feminist thought. Through the narrative she establishes, the speaker clearly positions herself against the Milan Libreria and in favour of a more equal opportunity oriented strategy for empowering women through political institutions.
Here the mapping of political positions within Milanese feminism shows dissimilar ideologies intrinsically related to differing political practices:

**Int 6 Ext 7**

Whoever studies Italian feminism would notice that there are divergent routes for instance the theory of sexual difference was one of them which I have contested for a long time and that expressed itself through the theories and the documents produced by the Milan Bookstore Collective. The other one is an attempt to take forward autocoscienza, the subconscious practice that is the topics about the body. The one, with others, devolved all my efforts and my passion for many years. I think in particular about the 10 years of the magazine Lapis, paths of feminine reflection which were very much participated in but didn’t influence very much the public debate because this was a moment in which the 1970s practices have caused a lot of troubles. So they favoured the structuring of a thought which was very much simplified, that is the thought of sexual difference. It separates the cultures of the masculine and the feminine again and attempts an explanation of feminine difference in a traditional sense through care work and mothering giving it a positive value.

This speaker contrasts the work of the Milan Libreria with the other strand of Milanese feminism that better represents, in her idea, the legacy of autocoscienza experience. According to her explicit position as opposed to the Libreria delle Donne, the reason why her own approach was not successful in the 1970s (but it is gaining more attention now) is because society was not ready to welcome the uncomfortable topics of psychoanalytic centred practices and autocoscienza. The fact that, after ten years of publication the magazine Lapis did not find an echo in the public debate is explained by the fact that public opinion was not ready to understand them. By contrast, a simplified version of the thought of sexual difference worked better, yet remained negative in its effects: according to the above speaker, reinterpreting care work and mothering as part of sexual difference does not advance anything new and amounts to re-proposing old models.

In the next quote, the criticism in some depth includes the essentialist nature of a more simplified and accessible version of differenza sessuale. The speaker contrasts differenza with the inconscio practice which was at the centre of consciousness-raising experience:

**Int 6 Ext 8**

That of differenza sessuale is a position that I criticized very much because I think it’s an analogue vision of the masculine, if after a resignification, “feminine” still means the attitude to care, it’s nothing new and we know very well what kind of use of this the Church makes. At the centre of autocoscienza practice instead, and the inconscio practice with this other branch of feminism that I with others have attempted to take forward in Italy (and today is getting an
increasing attention) is the one starting not from difference but from sexual dualism (...). To work on this means involving directly men in the care of the bodies (...). Until men put their own hands into the care of people, from children to the elderly to the sick, men will always kill with ease...

The above speaker proposes a philosophical criticism of sexual difference, pointing to the fact that the idea of the feminine in the theory of differenza sessuale is an analogue version of the masculine and gives a value to care that is nothing different from the position of the Catholic Church (therefore including the discourse and material implications of women belonging to the household). She contributes to the mapping of the conflicting positions in contemporary Milanese feminism and advances, as a starting point, a “dualism” rather than difference; a practice attentive to the subconscious which works on the body and aims for men to take part in the care of bodies too in order to reach a substantial equality.

The same speaker concludes with a hope for future change:

**Int 6 Ext 9**
*I think there must be a deep change and women should question themselves about the weight they put on maternity. A maternity that extends from the son to the husband to the lover in Italian familism and there are no doubts that women seek to wrest a poor power consisting of making themselves indispensable to others within the family.*

Here a critique of sexual difference is implicit: in Italian familism, the role of the woman/mother in making herself indispensable within the family has been her only power domain, but it is a poor form of power because it is limited to the private sphere. A real change would consist of a lesser commitment from women to the idea of a maternity that extends to every member of the family.

The outcome of mapping the political positioning of past and contemporary feminist subjectivities in Milan suggests a fracture between the Milan Libreria and the LUD, which seems to have picked up the legacy of autocoscienza according to some of the speakers. The political thinking of sexual difference is not fully rejected and it is often recognized as valuable, but involves the speakers’ “talking against” the political positions of the Milan Libreria on equal opportunity and women’s representation in institutional politics. This positioning traces an imaginary boundary in the politics of Milanese feminism: the Milan Bookstore Collective, on one

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54 See Paul Ginsborg (1989) on the central role of the family in Italian culture.
hand, and the LUD (Libera Universita' delle Donne), on the other. Moreover, these positions are horizontally divided by an intergenerational gap, although the LUD is more engaged in keeping the dialogue active in heterogeneous directions.

Concluding remarks

Mapping changing subjectivities through narratives in this Chapter has followed Adriana Cavarero's work on Italian feminism and drawn upon the analytical tools offered by a literal, interpretative and reflexive approach to interview analysis (Mason 1996). What has emerged is that narration creates a relational space and this is true both in the case of autocoscienza practice, where the narratable self undergoes a process of subjectivation through collective experience and exposure to others, and in the more private experience of the interview where the speaker positions herself according to past and present narratives and, indirectly, to others. The themes nested in the narratives that Milan's feminist activists establish about their lives, and the way they conceive of political engagement, contribute to the mapping of feminist subjectivities in Milan. The contemporary situation in Milan presents two dimensions of political positioning. The first one is the intergenerational gap and the difficult communication between the older generation of feminist activists and the new generation of younger activists. The second dimension of differing feminist subjectivities in contemporary Milan that clearly emerges from the interview material is about the conflicts over theories of sexual difference and, in particular, the impact of the Milan Libreria delle Donne's work on the public feminist debate. The opposing positions are not just about the controversial political practices that the Libreria undertakes and in the use of complex language, but also revolve around fundamental issues regarding women's political representation in state institutions.

The analytical tool of identifying different issues provided by qualitative analysis allowed me to explore the map of different subjective positioning further. Throughout the first theme, the intergenerational change emerges strongly. Here, it is not just the subjectivities of Milanese feminists that have changed, but so too have the different settings in which they are expressed: the feminist movement on the one hand, and new kinds of relationally structured
networks, on the other. Modes of belonging to a group typical of the movement setting, for instance, have changed, as have the narratives by which speakers describe a more fluid way of belonging to groups (defined as multiple belonging). Individuals feel free to belong, transversally, to more than one political group and they feel that this strongly characterizes their political activity.

The theme of separatism sets up a contrast between old and new forms of separatism, the latter being more inclusive as it allows and even seeks a confrontation with the opposite sex. The narrative analysis on separatism suggests that contemporary forms of separatism are selective and that, although there is an opening towards a confrontation with men, the parameters of inclusiveness for accessing political groups seem restricted for women and not as inclusive as before. Also, the change in inclusiveness which emerged from the analysis of separatist practices can be understood as part of a shift from the setting of the movement (more inclusive and binding) to the setting of the networks (only selectively inclusive and more unbounded).

The shift from a private to a public sphere for Italian women in the 1970s is counterbalanced by a sort of circular path where the collectively conceived idea of a public, typical of the Italian 1968 movement, has taken the form of an individualization of political practices in contemporary networks. Therefore, for Milanese feminists, the circular path starts from the private life of the household, moves to the collective space of feminist groups, and shifts to a sort of individualization of political practices. As is clear from the interviews, the non-permeability of the group that does not allow integrating new members, the lack of full identification with the group and a greater freedom to belong in a non-exclusive way are all symptoms of a changed way of experiencing group belonging.

Chapter 5 addressed the ways in which Milanese women appropriated the polis. It has been shown that space appropriation starts from the material postionality of the body, whose relational and collective exposure, according an Arendtian definition of the political, plays an important role in both defining and affirming emergent political subjectivity. This process was particularly poignant in early feminism as it contributed to shape feminist standpoints and politics in Milan. Consciousness raising and separatism, and narratives as an integrative part of these, are here identified as key spatial practices that Milanese feminist have used towards identity building and the mobilization of common resources in order to become visible as
political subjects in Milan. In this Chapter, changing subjectivities within Milanese feminism challenge the political and spatial order of gender relations through the practice of narrating. The desire for narrated stories gave, and in a different ways still gives, feminists a social identity that exposes them politically. Through reclaiming the body, personal bonds established through narratives become intertwined with the relationality of political location. In this way, politics of location comes to represent the interface and the site of inscription for specific modes of subjectivity.

The next Chapter will draw on the material aspects of women's collective space appropriation in Milan and will highlight the tensions between not having a place and having a place, between centre and periphery, and the blurred boundaries of domestic and public space.
Chapter 6. Appropriating city spaces: from feminist spaces to contemporary women’s centres in Milan

This Chapter discusses the degree of boundedness or rootedness of both feminist spaces created in the 1970s and contemporary women’s associations and centres which are not necessarily related to the feminist movement although their activities are women oriented. This approach is aimed at depicting a continuity in women’s collective action that takes into account the transformations from a movement oriented political action to a more diffused form of feminism (Calabro’ and Grasso 2004) drawn upon in Chapter 3. From the 1990s onwards, in fact, there has been a proliferation of civil society organizations, third sector associations and charities all claiming a women’s only leadership and focussing on women-specific micro and macro politics, ranging from Italian and migrant women’s integration in specific Milanese neighbourhoods to EU financed projects aiming to booster gender mainstreaming and women’s participation in Italian institutions. The shift from feminist movement to a more diffused form of feminism, although not fixed and essential categories, carry with them a transformation of the ways in which Milan’s urban space is appropriated and used.

While in Chapters 2 and 3 I discussed the meaning of autonomous and separatist spaces for the Milanese feminist movement, in this Chapter I will address the appropriation of separatist spaces and its link with the Milanese territory. The Chapter draws on the appropriation of both feminist and women’s spaces and the kind of social relations and political actions they enacted in Milan between the late 1960s and today. It uses secondary literature, archives, interview data, personal conversations with activists, participant observation, unpublished sources and movement publications to build maps and locate feminist and women’s spaces in Milan. The visual aspect to the maps is useful to put into context the different degrees of boundedness of these spaces in Milan and its territory. The term “bounded” derives from “bound” and carries with it the idea of a link to a specific territory which on the one
hand roots the space in question (women's space) to its territory (Milan) and on the other hand constitutes and delimits it according to given boundaries, be they real or imagined.

Theoretical insights on the appropriation of urban space will be given using a Lefebvrian framework elaborated by Doderer (2003) drawing on the social production of space which is specific for feminist publics. Within the provided analytical framework, my contribution is to add three levels of analysis to understand Milanese feminist and women's appropriation of urban space: the importance of women's spaces' boundedness and borders, the shift from atopia to topia and the analysis of the nature of the appropriated spaces as polymorphic spaces. My argument is supported by maps and illustrations throughout the Chapter. In addition, the visualization of women's centres and organizations found in this Chapter is a useful tool to draw on or to exclude discourses, such as gentrification, when addressing the spaces of the women's movement in Milan.

Women's centres and associations in Milan stem from heterogeneous origins and are situated in various degrees of continuity with the feminist movement. Each of the selected centres featured in section 6.3 of this Chapter offers a different kind of “boundedness” to the urban area. For instance, the Libera Universita' delle Donne (from here on LUD), an organization which situates itself along the trajectory of the Milanese feminist movement, did not have a fixed gathering space and went to meet other groups in their peripheral sites experimenting with different forms “of being” on the territory. The Casa Delle Donna Maltrattate (CADM) is an organization whose work is inspired by the theory of sexual difference. It is a shelter that offers psychological assistance and refuge for battered women and organizes secret locations in the city to allow those women who have been abused to live in a safe place, enacting another atypical and specific kind of boundedness. Some other women's groups, like Mondodonna, without defining themselves as feminist, and situated specifically outside Milanese feminist movement's trajectories, are active in creating a link within the neighbourhood in a peripheral part of Milan and work on integration issues and social cohesion, whilst also offering a third kind of boundedness. Prior to examining these selected sites, however, the next section will deal with the appropriation of feminist publics through the increasingly evident visibility of feminist city spaces in 1970s Milan.

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To widen the imagination of space and allow new perspectives for an access to city spaces which is understood both socially and politically, and therefore to understand the importance of feminist publics in Milan, it is fundamental to look at the ways in which urban space is appropriated and used. Henri Lefebvre (1975) argues that social space is a social product, suggesting that the production of space is not about the production of material objects and goods, but a series of relations that are created by production forces, social practices, different technologies and products of knowledge, as well as social structures and institutions (Doderer 2003). Space is not, therefore, just the resulting effect of its production, such as monuments and goods, but also, and fundamentally, the result of a production process as an experience of the accumulation of knowledges such as the work of production and reproduction. Production for Lefebvre clearly refers back to Marx and Engels in relating to modes of production, goods and work.

According to Doderer (2003), what is unsolved in Lefebvre (1975)’s work is the concept of reproduction where the role of women in Lefebvrian theory of space rests unexplained: a sort of biological determinism overshadows the spatial consequences of the reproduction work. However, if not explicitly addressed in feminist terms, Lefebvre offers an interpretation of space that can be useful for feminist theory on space. In fact, space for Lefebvre is a social space that is embodied in subjects, in their bodies and actions. In this sense, the human body is also a space (as I outlined in Chapter 5):

Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space (Lefebvre 1997:19).
Space is for Lefebvre a product, but at the same time it is not an object in a physical sense nor a pure abstraction. Instead, the term space is always employed to mean a social space. People do not stand in front of or close to social space like an exhibition or a picture, but they assume that space as it is constituted (Doderer 2003). This special dialectical relation is constitutive of spatial praxes that have to be understood as social and political praxes. Lefebvre (1975) describes space as an urban/social space that is structured in three formations characterised as (i) spatial practices, (ii) spaces of representation and (iii) spaces of imagination such as conceptual representation and antagonist thought. Lefebvre’s *La production de l’espace* (1975) clearly represents an attempt to spatialize social relations.

Lefebvre describes form, function and structure as intrinsic to the above spatialization of social relations. This, according to Doderer (2003), raises questions as to the ways in which issues of gender, race, ethnicity and class are situated in Lefebvre’s spatialization of social relations, given that he describes not only the structural but also the functional and formal aspects of spatialized social relations. Doderer suggests that the facets of functionality and formality can be addressed through the appropriation of space. Appropriation does not only refer to a natural occupation of goods in a Marxian sense but to an activity which is first and foremost spatial, taking place *in* space and *with* space.

Appropriation of urban space happens at every level of the triadic construction developed by Lefebvre (1975), and describes the forms of everyday spatial appropriations in the first case (spatial practices) and of spaces of representation in the second case. In terms of the third case (spaces of imagination), Lefebvre includes in his construction the appropriation of countercultural spaces. To add another level of complexity, Lefebvre refers to spaces as *topoi*, (singular form of the Greek *topos*) and describes *isotopia* spaces as analogous spaces, *heterotropia* as contrasting and different spaces and *utopia* as places of that which no longer has a place. In addition, the shift from *a-topia* (literally, lacking a place) to *topia* (having a place) was proposed by feminist movements in the West and allowed for women’s access to the political sphere. This perspective integrates Lefebvre’s analysis of social space by offering a new category of spaces aimed at including sexual difference in the horizon of the already delineated isotopic, heterotopic and utopic spaces.

55 See Fraser’s discussion of counter publics in Chapter 2
The *Production of Space* first published in 1975 and translated into English in 1991, constitutes an attempt to combine all possible forms of space production and appropriation, from abstract to material ones, and represents Lefebvre’s effort to theorize space from a western European and capitalist perspective. As outlined by Lefebvre, everyday life is an important productive force of urban space and the accent on the active role of involved subjects is proposed through the strategies of space appropriation that challenge hegemonic power and pre-established forms of power relations. In this sense, it is useful to recall Nancy Fraser’s (1990) formulation of the concept of counter spaces, discussed in Chapter 2, and particularly suitable for the interpretation of feminist publics from the late 1960s onwards. Spatial practices, spaces of imagination and spaces of oppositional thought are Lefebvrian spatial categories that are helpful to understand if an egalitarian horizon can represent a possible target for the utopia and heterotopia spaces of sexual difference. Everyday life becomes the starting point for the transformation of social relations and of gender differences.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Milanese feminist movement clearly started appropriating spaces of everyday life in which to live, organize and participate in political meetings and build up feminist struggles. New spatialities were created to enhance and promote a culture of the feminist project though women’s centres and organizations. This newly modified and gendered Lefebvrian triadic construction offers insights that allow us to understand feminist public spaces and their contextual spatializations in urban spaces. As will be outlined in the next section, boundedness and borders provide the starting point and the theoretical background to discuss the shift from *topia* to *atopia* and the hybrid nature of women’s spaces. This will be useful in examining the specifically gendered processes at stake in the appropriation of urban public space.
6.2 Boundedness, unboundedness and borders

In order to think through the different degrees of boundedness of feminist spaces in Milan, it is useful to define key concepts that relate to a geographical analysis of the territory. Borders and border studies are normally used to depict the ever changing limits and separation lines between territorial states, regions or other institutional constituencies (Minghi 1963; Prescott 1987; Paasi 1998, 2005; Rigo 2008). In particular, Etienne Balibar in the introduction of Enrica Rigo’s (2008) book on the boundaries of Europe, defines territory as a point of encounter of geographically specific material logics, belonging to the sphere of law, where both a right on the territory and a right to the territory co-exist and belong to heterogeneous systems of power and influence.

While the legal definition of territory is of limited importance here, boundary, in dividing one territory from another, is an important conceptual tool in the study of women’s spaces. Indeed, it relates to the construction of identity and issues of separatism, in terms of boundaries which are drawn between inside and outside, according to sexual difference and belonging. The term border, however, allows for a material as well as a metaphorical meaning. In Mezzadra and Neilson (2008) borders are defined as tensions and conflicts, like trajectories which cross, traverse and intersect different spaces while contributing to make the concept of space increasingly more heterogeneous and complex.

Borders transcend disciplinary separations among the social sciences and are studied from a variety of different perspectives. As Rada Ivekovic (2008) outlines, borders multiply across the spaces that they are supposed to delineate and the boundaries that they set “might be social, political, economic or otherwise beyond territoriality” (1). The author pushes the metaphor of borders far beyond its material sense to encompass a criticism of normative dichotomies which usually conceal hierarchies such as male and female, black and white, within and without, up and down, east and west which contribute in creating essentialized borders in the mind (Ivekovic 2008). In a way, separatism is also a means to essentialize difference based on sexual belonging in order to conquer, build and preserve a specific political identity. The appropriation of women-only spaces in Milan has to do with this production and reproduction of territoriality and, as Anssi Paasi (2005) would put it, it has to do with state power...
(as is evident from the anti-institutional nature of the first appropriated women spaces delineated in Chapter 2), human agency and experience. Boundaries are therefore a way to delimit the appropriation of a sphere to keep separate from other spheres. In the case of feminism, it has been about keeping the women's sphere separate from the men's in a territory, the one of the polis, which had been alien to them. As the discussion of the shift from atopia to topia later in this Chapter will clarify, from being deprived of a space, the setting of boundaries through delimiting separatist spaces became a way to preserve the identity-based conquest.

Within the social sciences academic debate, identity is strictly connected to a definition of social identity and boundaries are to be found in wider social practices and discourse, which also include economics, culture, education, socialization and governance (Paasi 2005). Paasi also warns that borders are unique and need to be theorized contextually. Although in this Chapter borders signify space boundaries, boundedness and separatist appropriations of urban space, the concept of border is often used by social movements to focus on issues of migration and citizenship advocating the abolition of borders for the free mobility of people, not just of goods, across space. The questions that borders raise in this work relate to the creation of borders through the appropriation of feminist separatist spaces and subsequently with the blurring of neat borders through the relational practices and collective action enacted by contemporary women organizations. Which kind of crossing and which kind of openings are proposed within contemporary women's spaces? In which ways can the idea of border be useful to understand women's space? Is there a way in which borders shift and dissolve, open up?

One way to respond to these questions is to locate ourselves outside dominant discourses on space and try to develop a "border thinking approach" as suggested by Mignolo (2000), allowing us to understand the very production of the heterogeneity of diversified space and time (Mezzadra and Nilesen 2008). Border thinking refers to the mental borders from where one can acquire a perspective located at the border of the power/knowledge regime. This image recalls bell hooks' (2005) margins of radical openness discussed in the methodology chapter and relates to methodological and epistemological questions. However,

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56 Nancy Naples (2008) in her paper on intersectionality ironically points out that when searching on the Internet for groups defining themselves "without borders", she found ubiquitous responses such as Teachers without borders, Doctors without borders, Reporters without borders, Librarians without borders and, of course, Women without borders.
having specified this, the idea of border is both a powerful metaphorical and material tool to analyze the spaces of the Milanese women’s movement.

Moreover, ‘border’ is strictly connected to spatially bounded space. While ‘border’ indicates an external limit separating space, horizontally, from other similar or different spatial entities, ‘boundedness’ is rather a vertical link with the territory which indicates a rootedness and embeddedness in the same territory. According to Paasi (2002), bounded spaces are a connotation of regional space as opposed to “mobile world”. Therefore, the concept of boundedness developed here takes into account the fixed link existing between people and their territory, and used by Paasi to describe regional identities. On the other side of the spectrum, ‘unbounded’ means the loss of this rigid link, as I will make clear later in the Chapter.

In terms of the shift from a-topia to topia, for instance, it will be shown that the first phase of atopia, which for women meant not having a political space, lacked precise boundaries as it was an indeterminate place, the domestic sphere, which was far removed from the polis, the place of politics. Instead, the appropriated topia spaces are well-defined spaces with clear boundaries, as shown in the maps (figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.5). When spaces are only relationally defined, as in the case of networks and unbounded spaces, the material boundary fades away and is replaced with a more complex and immaterial definition of borders. In this instance, there is a sort of circularity in the presence of boundaries: from not having boundaries to having boundaries as an identity statement, to a further opening up of territorial borders through relational practices and collective action.

In the case of polymorphic spaces, as will be described in section 6.2.2, the boundaries between heterogeneous spaces are asymmetric, discontinuous and non-normative and, as we will see, porous. Polymorphic spaces are both bounded and unbounded, they have a link with the territory, but at the same time they try to challenge and subvert it, creating networks and types of relationality that have the final effect of decentring them territorially. The idea of de-territorialization and re-territorialization stems from the psychoanalytically laden work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), but in the current geopolitical literature, as Paasi (1998) reminds us, they seem to be much used metaphors for cultural, social and spatial change. Boundaries contribute to de-territorialize and re-territorialize Milan’s space when women’s spaces are established in the city and they have both a material and symbolical connotation as shown above. Therefore, their fixed, absolute and quasi material essence is challenged by the
idea of boundaries as processes which exist in the socio-cultural action and discourses. In the next section, the progressive appropriation of boundaries by the Milanese feminist movement will be illustrated according to the shift from not having a place, to having a place.

6.2.1 Before the polis: from atopia to topia

Political and spatial paths intersect and there is always a relation between space and how space is used. As in Rosaria Fichera (1996, unpublished source)’s work, the history of women’s appropriation of a public voice is characterized by a shift from atopia (in ancient Greek topos means place and the privative “a” transforms the term, literally, into “without place”) to topia, or having a place. In the atopia phase, “only the symbolic dimension was possible, as the material was not represented” (1996:4) whereas atopia does not refer to an absolute absence, but to an absence from a specific place, spatially defined. For instance, a collective is an atopic space as it is composed by people, but it does not necessarily exist in relation to a specific place (Fichera 1996 unpublished source). However, the existence of recognizable spaces in the city creates the breaking point in a society that makes it difficult for women to have both visibility and a dignified presence in the public sphere. Topia, therefore, signifies a space of identification in which it is possible to be visible and consequently recognized in the public sphere.

In Milan, public visibility was achieved by the feminist movement from the late 1960s onwards through the progressive appropriation of city spaces. Feminists followed both individual and collective paths in urban space and their aim was to build up the type of network that would link feminist centres and those spaces where women would usually go. As many other women’s experiences in the world, Milanese feminists’ experience of place is difficult to re-construct, since it is only known through oral history and is seldom written down. Women’s unwritten genealogy is usually reconstructed through narrations, direct experiences of some places, sometimes indirect experience, pieces of lived life, thoughts, militant slogans, pictures and objects that would have allowed for a reconstruction of this particular story. In my work, it has been possible to locate the initial spaces appropriated by the Milanese feminist movement
between the late 1960s and the 1980s thanks to the work of the Centro Studi sulla Storia del Movimento delle Donne in Italia, today called Fondazione Badaracco.

Figure 6.1 Feminist groups in 1970s Milan

The above map is the result of information collected, in part, from Calabro' and Grasso (2004) and, in part, during my research in the main archive of feminism in Milan, Fondazione Badaracco. Some of the missing information about the early appropriation of feminist spaces has been re-constructed from personal conversations with activists. However, for instance, it has not been possible to gather information on where the feminist groups formed in the factories used to meet. The only data available is Collettivo della Borletti, as is evident from the
Luisa Pogliana (personal conversation with the author, 2009) points out that feminists within factories, in Milan and elsewhere, did not usually gather in organized groups or collectives. There were, rather, spontaneous groups of women who used to discuss specifically feminist issues, but, in general, trade unions were the official locations for feminist struggles connected to factory work, in a way which was transversal and cross-cut each of the above mentioned factories.

As is evident from the green square highlighted in the map above (Figure 6.1), most of the feminist groups used to be located in the city centre. As a consequence of the urban regeneration process mentioned in Chapter 2, most of them have been closed or had to move outside of the city centre. The named centres outside the central area no longer exist, except Gruppo madri del Leoncavallo which is listed in Calabro’ and Grasso (2000) among feminist groups, but is not recognized as such by most of the interviewees because these women identify with their role as mothers rather than as feminists.

![Figure 6.2 Feminist groups in 1970s Milan's city centre](image-url)
By taking a closer look at the second map (Figure 6.2), which reproduces the green section of Figure 6.1, it is possible to see that the highest concentration of the initial women's groups in Milan was in the city centre. In particular, the Cherubini, one of the most radical groups of 1970s Italian feminism moved to Col di Lana in the Navigli area, a south-east part of Milan, but still very central. It is described by Martin and Moroni (2007) as the neighbourhood with the highest density of extra parliamentary head offices in Europe. The collettivo San Gottardo was also based in the same area, Ticinese-Porta Genova. Figure 5.2 also shows Cicip & Ciciap, a feminist separatist restaurant still in existence at the time of writing (2008) which promotes meetings, debates and music. While Cicip & Ciciap is still located in Milan's city centre thanks to a special concession from the Milan city council, the Libreria delle Donne had to move in the early 1980s due to an increase in house prices in Milan's city centre, leaving its initial location in via Dogana.

The Ticinese area exemplifies an area of urban frontier between centre and periphery and, at the same time, a frontier between different social classes that were historically used to sharing different lifestyles. As was the case in Ticinese, the political head offices of extra-parliamentary groups, including feminist groups, have traditionally been located in the historical centre of the city to occupy the symbolical centre of power and compete with institutional and political headquarters. Following the urban development path delineated in Chapter 2, they moved out in the direction of the peripheral and industrial areas. The newly, often illegal, appropriated spaces by the Milanese social movement (also outlined in Chapter 2) have to be understood as embedded in the new territorial counter-cultural practices. From the point of view of social movements, Milan's territorial benchmarks expanded beyond the area where the institutional head offices were based. They therefore moved away from the city centre.

The idea that uprisings in Milan happened through space (Marin and Moroni 2007) resonates in the case of the spatial trajectories of the Milanese feminist movement. In the initial phase, for feminists, through the re-appropriation of denied spaces, the shift from "not being there" to "being there" occurred in the public space of the polis and its most representative location (the city centre). Personal paths and the collective trajectory of the feminist movement contributed to the appropriation of separatist urban space in Milan. As occurred in autocoscienza (Chapter 5), it was necessary to find those spaces which were appropriate for
reflexive communication among feminist subjects. Thinking the unthought-of and speaking the unspoken would only have been possible in places which were located outside of the usual cultural traditions in the public sphere, until then organized by men in the Italian society (Fichera 1996, unpublished source).

6.2.2 Polymorphic spaces

The starting point for the appropriation of public spaces in Italian cities took place in the atopic, submerged and unspecific space of the home. Domestic space was for too long defined as a “natural” space for women (Wilson 1991, Terlineden 2003, Landes 1995), within the rigid patriarchal order of Italian society. For this reason, domestic space was, for Italian feminists, the starting point for the subversion of social space and relations, an area to re-appropriate through deconstructing it and challenging its traditional order (Fare’ 1992). As argued in Basanini (1990), Fare’ (1992), Muntoni (1982) and Sarti (1995), the house in Italy was a space in which one gender (usually women) was meant to contribute to the continuous care of the other (generally male but also the youth, the elderly and the sick) and keep the house as a status symbol for the household. The domesticity of the house came to be associated as both a museum (as it had to be kept tidy and clean) and a prison for women. Ida Fare’ (1992) describes the need for incessant and cyclical cleaning and nurturing with the image of the invisible woman who, in the domestic sphere, keeps cancelling her own footsteps to remain invisible. In this perspective, domestic subversion of the strict domestic roles within the house represented the first symbolic rupture with the Italian cultural establishment operated by the Italian feminist movement. To untidy the home, re-organize it according to a new use-value, inhabit it with different and new criteria, eliminating sofas and chairs, and adding carpets and cushions also meant freeing bodily postures and eliminating barriers between different spaces in the house. This also meant enriching it with new meanings and bringing the political within domestic walls, creating the polis through house meetings of feminist collectives or press committees of independent journals (Fichera 1996 unpublished source).

Making the domestic sphere public was the first step towards the re-appropriation of denied public spaces. The ghost of the home as a prison was eliminated and the new home
became a primary place that was to be inhabited differently. In this sense, the space of the home becomes porous and the home becomes the place where feminist collectives meet or where independent feminist magazines such as Lapis were discussed and produced. This disruption of the fixed borders between internal/external, public and private, by bringing public life within domestic walls suggests a radical change in the use value of the home and a new re-appropriation of its spaces where the space of the house becomes polymorphic. The term polymorphic (etymologically meaning “many shapes”) suggests a multiplicity of forms and uses that the exclusive and protected spaces of the house came to assume. Similarly to the opening of separatist spaces in the city, houses which were open to collective meetings and feminist debates saw a transition from atopos to topos. The crossing of boundaries and the hybridization of fixed categories of public and private spaces happened both in the domestic and public spheres. Squatted feminist collectives were often also semi-public: where the living space often overlapped with the political space.

In these newly appropriated spaces, the development of new social habits were enabled within squatted feminist collectives, workplace collectives and in private houses. A progressive blurring of the boundaries between public and private spaces also occurred in the so-called case delle donne [women’s houses]: after making private homes public, Milanese feminists started making public sites (such as squatted houses regularly used for political meetings) private by adding domestic furniture and comforts to them. They reconfigured the places of the new feminist thought as domestic spaces, opening up the dual space of separation, domestic versus public, and conceived of the new political spaces as multifunctional and, as such, polymorphic.

Figures 6.3 / 6.4 Mancinelli squat. Source: Donne Mostra collective
The above photographs (Figures 6.3 and 6.4) represent the (no longer existing) Mancinelli where meetings with more than one hundred women used to take place. The building was squatted in 1975 and was adjacent to Leoncavallo which was the first social centre in Milan. Mancinelli was an unsafe place to live given the unstable conditions of the old building; however it was made “homey” by the people who were involved with the management of the political activities taking place in the building in via Mancinelli. Activists from the neighbourhoods of Loreto and Lambrate brought carpet, an oven and chairs and it became the head office of the Mancinelli group. The use of Mancinelli’s social space reflects a semi-private use of an illegally appropriated house that can also be seen as a semi-public location for political assembly (in line with the anti-institutionalism of the feminist movement discussed in Chapter 2). This mix of elements of private and public also contributes to classifying women’s houses as polymorphic spaces.

To offer a similar example, another squatted building in via Lanzone hosted a group of women living there and also hosted Milan’s head office of the magazine Quotidiano Donna. The main activity of Quotidiano Donna was a gathering of information about the feminist movement; it also made rooms available for women’s meetings and for whoever wanted to spend time there (Interview with a via Lanzone activist, Milan 2006: Int 3 Ext 2). Via Lanzone was active within the struggle for a right to a home and is best understood as belonging to Milanese territorial coutercultural practices. Beyond information and feminist culture dissemination, in via Lanzone there was also a band rehearsing there, called Ciocobananas and later Clito (the band appears in Fellini’s film *La città delle donne*). The variety of activities taking place in these counter-spaces assumed multiple forms and meanings and were an ongoing experimentation as centres for communication, information, culture production, experimental living and polymorphic laboratories of sexual liberation. However, with the exception of places such as Mancinelli and Lanzone, in general, Milanese feminists, unlike the rest of the Milan 1968 movement acting within the struggle for a right to a home (related to Milan’s urban planning problems delineated in Chapter 2), were reluctant to illegally occupy buildings as they could often benefit from the resource of private houses made available for their meetings. Also, most of the radical groups chose to rent in order not to be subjected to
evictions and therefore to guarantee the continuity of their work (private conversation with an activist, Milan 2006).

The so-called "practice of relationality among women" demonstrated an ability to shape social contexts, to lead multiple activities (such as organizing feminist meetings, opening movement journals such as Quotidiano Donna, Grattacielo, Lapis and Fluttuaria). As Doreen Massey (2005) suggests, such spaces are best thought of as the production of interrelations and are constituted through interactions, and it is appropriate to conceive of such relations as embedded practices generating different possible forms of space. The fact that space, as much as social identities and political subjectivities, is a result of ongoing interactions that cannot therefore be captured in their essential features makes it one of the key aspects of the passage from atopia to topos in Milanese feminism. This happened through the political practice of the relationality among women. As Manuela Fraire argued (1996), all the revolutions of uses, habits, mentality and so on happened as if the issue of space was generated from the practice, both involving the body and questioning the body, of being among women, and assumed a powerful political meaning in Italian feminism. This was also documented in Chapter 5 through the analysis of the corporeal aspect of the processes at stake in autocoscienza practices.

From the late 1960s onwards, the hybridization between innovative spatial practices and bodily implications (as shown in Chapter 5) informed by feminist theory suggested a radically new social use of urban space. As a result, space itself underwent a transformation assuming new values and meanings where the celebrated relationality among women took place. As Fraire (1996) argues, the strengths that allowed this transformation to take place started from inhabiting the body differently as a primary space to then contaminating the private space of the home and subsequently the public space of the polis. The relationship with the "others" gave women a renewed relationship aimed at re-territorializing the limits between inside and outside, internal/external, private/public. The use of space, until then mainly limited to the restricted horizon of the atopic sphere of the home in the majority of the cases, changed, as the body itself became a new space able to inhabit the topic place of the polis.

The next section will introduce three case studies. It will start with an illustration of a joint movement and civil society mobilization that in January 2006 brought 200,000 women and men in Milan's streets and piazzas, reclaiming women's reproductive rights in a clash with the religious institutions of the country.
6.3 Territory and place. Three case studies

Contemporary women's spaces are the legacy of the kind of public spaces that the feminist movement produced in 1970s Milan. There are 103 such spaces and they are distributed unevenly across the Milanese territory, with a higher concentration in the city centre and fewer in the second and third rings around it (see Figure 6.5)\(^{57}\).

Figure 6.5 Contemporary women's organizations and centres in Milan

\(^{57}\) The map was created from the data found in a Milan council publication which lists existing women's organizations, associations and centres in 2005-2006.
As is evident from the map, the second most important area in terms of density of women’s centres/organizations is the north east region of the city. Gradually, the centres spread uniformly and dominate the northern part of the city.

The cases that I have chosen, Libera Università’ delle Donne (LUD), Mondodonna and Casa delle Donne Maltrattate (CADM), are situated in neighbourhoods which are depicted in bold on this map (respectively Porta Nuova, Porta Romana and Quarto Cagnino). In particular, Mondodonna is the only women’s organization identifiable in the Quarto Cagnino area and the LUD is situated in the only large dot in the map where other feminist and women organizations in Milan are also located on the premises of Elvira Badaracco, a legacy to the Milanese women cause. The CADM is situated within the second concentric ring near Porta Romana. About two thirds of the organizations represented on the map do not directly stem from specific feminist experience. However, half of them were active in the organization of the January 2006 mobilization against the revisions of Italian law regulating abortion rights (Law 194/1998) before the national referendum on reproductive rights in June 2006. The sheer scale of the demonstration (200,000 participants) suggests a heightened sensitivity towards women’s issues and the opposition of joint civil society actors regarding the interference of the Vatican into secular matters such as reproductive rights and the female body.

“Usciamo dal silenzio” [Let’s break the silence] is a network of dissenting women’s organizations and other diverse civil society actors who mobilized against the Italian government and the hierarchy of the Church attempting to limit Italian women’s right to choose freely on reproductive issues. Both the conservative government and the Church have been interfering with the important work of consultori familiari (a result of women’s struggle as outlined in Chapter 2) by reducing their funding and by having non-professional volunteers on location to persuade women against abortion. The mobilization called “Usciamo dal silenzio” originated from an email circulated by an Italian journalist. A range of civil society organizations got involved in it, from movement organizations to more institutional actors. After a couple of preliminary meetings, in January 2006, “Usciamo dal Silenzio” succeeded in mobilizing the greatest number of protesters gathered in Italy on women’s related issues.
As is evident from the above photographs (Figures 6.8 and 6.9), the people crowding Milan’s piazza Duomo and its street represents a mobilized mass of individuals around a social justice issue. The space of the \textit{polis} offers itself for a temporary appropriation where boundaries between what is conceived as public and the issues which have been, up to the 1970s, a domain of the private, such as reproduction and the female body, are crossed.

If space is seen as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity (Massey 2005), it makes sense to analyze my data set as holistic rather than cross sectional. In this Chapter, data will be sorted in a way that does not necessarily use the same lens across the whole. Rather than cross-sectional data, I will look at discrete parts, bits and units of my data sets and document those parts that are specifically useful for widening a spatial imagination. In the following case studies, different kinds of spatiality are enacted. This will be examined by using the analytical elements provided above: their relation to Milan’s territory, their boundedness, to which extent they are polymorphic and if they represent an \textit{atopia} to \textit{topia} evolution.
The interviews used in this Chapter include interviews with members or leaders of women's organizations, in each of the cases key members of the organization in question. In the first case my interviewee was the leader of the LUD, who has been active in self-managed and anti-authoritarian education projects such as the “150 hour-courses” (le centocinquanta ore) and who I approached through recommendation of the archivist at the main feminist archive in Milan (Fondazione Badaracco), situated in the same courtyard in the premises of Unione Femminile in Porta Nuova. The second interviewee is the co-founder of the CADM, an ex-activist coming from the experience of the UDI and advocate of differenza sessuale theory. As the interviewee is active in debates and feminist meetings in Milan, I met her during one of these meetings and contacted her in order to agree the interview which took place in the offices of CADM near Porta Romana. I recruited the third interviewee on the Council's official list of Milanese women’s organization and I was warmly welcomed by a group of elderly members of Mondodonna who were enthusiastic to share the experience of their centre with me. As mentioned above and in Chapter 4, among the interview material I gathered during my fieldwork in Milan I chose the cases that enclose the specific theoretical aspects concerning space analyzed in this Chapter (different degrees of boundedness, the dialectic tension between atopia to topia and the feature of being or not being a polymorphic space).

6.3.1 Adult education and female culture: Libera Universita' delle Donne

As shown in the map (Figure 6.5), nowadays LUD is based in the elegant buildings of the Unione Femminile in corso di Porta Nuova, a heritage left by Elvira Badaracco for Milanese women’s organizations head offices and activities. At the time of writing (early 2009), other women's associations, organizations and centres are based in the late medieval buildings in corso di Porta Nuova, a historic part of Milan: the archive and the library of the Fondazione Badaracco, the Unione Femminile and Crinali Onlus. LUD itself offers its space to other groups, for instance the Milanese group Sconvegno, co-authors of a recent edition of Feminist Review (2007) on Italian feminism, and to other groups which also meet there. The LUD offers a unique perspective on the possible relations to urban space created by a relationality induced by the initial lack of physical location in which to carry out its activities.
LUD was constituted as an association in 1987. The association was created to solve a problem when the trade unions' funding for the “150-hour courses” was dramatically reduced. LUD initially did not have a fixed location but its offices were made available twice a week in one of the Milan's council buildings (from the council assessor Manacorda who belonged to a centre-left administration during the years prior to the early 1990s, when political scandals hit the establishment of Milanese hierarchies of political power). This availability of this space lasted for 4 years until the administration changed in 1992 and Lega Lombarda came into power in Milan. The following quote explains the nature of LUD's activities:

*Int 18 Ext 1*

The relevant aspect was the overlap between feminism and the thirst for knowledge from housewives and workers...it was not a one-sided give and take, it was definitively an exchange. We, the educated teachers, we were lacking the vitality that comes from direct everyday experience...we did not teach academic lectures but we used to pose a question and that theme would be interrogated starting from everyday life experiences. These women would take a classic text and from their experiences they would give very interesting contributions so we realized that school did not just enrich us with knowledge but also made us lose touch with everyday life and experience.

As evoked in the above passage, the dialectical tension between everyday life and academic knowledge was mutually enriching for women belonging to different social classes and experiences. Educated teachers realized that their writing would move between already given

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58The 150-hour courses were specific training for women's education proposed by trade unions to employers and their governmental approval represented an achievement for trade unions. One of the women volunteering to teach in a 150-hour course was the initial co-founder of LUD, when in the late 1980s trade unions informed them that they wanted to stop investing in this form of adult education for workers (and included housewives). Pupils included those who were employed (they were allowed to subtract 150 hours from their work to attend class), housewives and the unemployed. The main activity of LUD was to bind feminism with uneducated women's will to learn. After the trade unions proposed to shut down the 150-hour course, both teachers and students decided to take over, continue the classes, and formed an association.

59The socialist party hegemony in Milan started after the election of Bettino Craxi in 1976 as a secretary of the party. This inaugurated a socialist era in Milan where its mayors were, over 16 years, Craxian: Carlo Tognoli (1976-1986) Paolo Pillitteri (relative of Craxi, 1986-1992) Giampiero Borghini (1992-1993). Craxi himself was prime minister between 1983 and 1987. This period was characterized by political and economical corruption until the inquisitions of 1992. With Tangentopoli, the ex-mayors Pillitteri and Tognoli were arrested. In the 1992 elections, PSI (the socialist party) and DC (Christian Democrats) almost disappeared and the parliamentary presence of ex-moderate communists (PDS) declined. Milanese left wing parties in general also declined which is due to the reduced number of workers, lynchpin of the left wing parties in Italy. After Tangentopoli, the party that supported the Italian cry for change, Lega Lombarda, stayed in power in Milan's local administration for 5 years (between 1993 and 1997 with Marco Formentini), and paved the way for Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, with Gabriele Albertini at the end of the 1990s (Foot 2001).
codes while less educated women were able to enrich their writing with fresh and unmediated ideas that were considered a resource from the former. One of the main aims of LUD's work was to offer a feminist and bottom-up criticism of established, constituted and formalized knowledges typical of the Italian academic system. Through the dialectic process described in the quote, both teachers and learners seek to de-structure existing (academic) knowledges through everyday women's experience. In this way, the kind of relationality among women at LUD succeeded in establishing political practices in which the everyday was a productive force of urban space, able to involve subjects in strategies in which both relationality and space appropriation constitute a challenge to hegemonic power. The polymorphism of this kind of space consists of the clash between established and normative knowledges, as opposed to the openness of everyday experience. The boundaries between the two areas were blurred during this kind of pedagogic exchange.

From a spatial point of view, at the start, LUD was not initially located in a specific building, but they found a way to make this an advantage. When they did not have a stable location where they could meet and organize their activities, they used to travel to the city and meet other women's groups scattered in Milan: in the consultori, in the libraries, in area committees and in CADMs (See Chapter 3 for details about CADMs) up until their closure. This distributed spatiality consists of a movement from a nucleus (the LUD) directed to the rest of Milanese territory, and aimed at reaching other political aggregations in the city to create heterotropic and polymorphic kinds of spatialities. Also, the option of meeting in private houses is recalled here:

**Int 18 Ext 3**
There was certainly a strong link between public and private as, lacking a fixed place, our managerial meeting and the whole teaching group used to meet once a month in private houses...the neighbours used to complain about the noise and [they would] bang on the walls... the president of our new association had just had a baby and would place it on the washing machine... the houses were “invaded”; can you see the beauty of it?

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60 When the territorial CADM were shut down, the Sportelli donna [women's shelters] were created by the Lega Lombarda administration in the early 1990s and were incorporated in other less politically relevant structures such as leisure centres.
The imaginative description of the meeting in a private house and the idea that the houses were "invaded" suggests that relations among the teachers in charge of the LUD were embedded practices designed to generate different possible forms of space.

At the same time, for LUD, the fact of not having a place (*atopia*) constituted a primary resource in order to enable a specific kind of space appropriation (towards other collective's *topoi*) to take place. Also, the women attending LUD's 150-hour courses were either housewives and/or workers who appropriated the social and cultural space offered by LUD with enthusiasm and brought their own everyday life to the LUD's collective experience of exchange privileging women's relationality. The transition from *atopia* to *topia* here suggests that from a lack (lack of a central space, lack of funding to carry on 150-hour activities), something positive was generated and developed. The practice of visiting other feminist collectives in Milan produced a certain kind of female relationality, and this gave rise to LUD becoming an independent association:

*Int 18 Ext 4*

The impediments are sometimes an extraordinary resource (...) that is, there are always different aspects of the same situation: sometimes a difficulty can create chances of having the initiative needed to find new forms of doing politics.

From having no space and having to go out and meet other groups, LUD has today shifted its position to being able to share spatial resources. LUD's headquarters are also the place where the group Sconvegno meets as does the Video survey Lab, Women in Black, Crinali Onlus and on Thursdays, the LUD group meets for autocoscienza sessions. It is also where "Usciamo dal silenzio" was organized. LUD is an open space welcoming contacts with international feminism. It provides an environment that can freely and constructively criticize male-based academic knowledge, constantly relating to other groups sharing similar objectives in Milan and nationally. This is the kind of publicity that LUD has built up over the years and the kind of relationality that it has to offer through its everyday practices defined though space.

The next centre, Casa delle donne maltrattate, is a shelter for battered women and, like LUD, suggests the existence of an "heterotopic space", in Lefebvrian sense delineated above, in line with the specific and heterogeneous features of the kind of spatiality it creates.
6.3.2 Casa delle donne maltrattate, an anti-violence shelter

Casa delle donne Maltrattate (CADM) is a women's association established in 1986 within the UDI\textsuperscript{61} in Milan. As a shelter for battered women, CADM's mandate is to help abused women within and outside family environments. The shelter offers telephone assistance, care and guidance towards hospitality and secret refuge houses for women who want to break the cycle of violence. The kind of services offered also range from legal information to the suggestion of possible links with Milan's territorial institutions such as social services and the court system. This also includes psychological assistance, support for work and housing, research projects, training and other interventions specific for post-traumatic disorders. CADM's methodology of care is explained in the following quote:

\textit{Int 4 Ext 5}

Managing hospitality as we have thought it implies that they are not just dormitory or emergency refuges, but they are freedom spaces because it's all about projects to reappropriate personal freedom. We have thought through these paths and we built methodologies, what we have called 'reception methodology'. We set up more than a hundred training courses in Italy and abroad on this reception methodology and we came to a convergence of past and present which is built on the relational practices among women and in particular on sexual difference.

As is evident from the quote, the work of CADM is inspired from relational practices suggested by the theory of sexual difference. CADM's practice of welcoming women in order to help them out of critical circumstances is predicated upon the basis of the "practice of relationality among women" stemming from the Milanese difference feminism.

\textit{Int 4 Ext 3}

We used to help every woman who was a victim of violence, from every age, religion or ethnicity. We were linked to the Milanese feminism of the time. I used to work in a consultorio, both Tiziana and I came from trade unions; we were "movement" women before the 1970s.

\textsuperscript{61} UDI (Unione Donne Italiane) is the most institutionalized part of the movement connected with Marxist feminism of double militancy as explained in Chapter 2.
In the above quote, the link with Milanese feminism is made evident, as well as the political path of the founding members of the centre.

CADM offers two kinds of spatialities. The first kind of spatiality happens during the so-called “contact”, the initial contact with the centre for reception and the problem assessment which happens in the head office of the shelter in via Piacenza (before 1990, it was a site in via Bagutta, Milan’s historical centre). After the initial assessment, a network of help is set in motion consisting of psychologists, counsellors and volunteers involved in the shelter’s rescuing activity. Depending on the case, some women need to be moved to a secret house62.

The second kind of spatiality is therefore the one of the secret refuge house for women who are victims of domestic or extra-domestic violence. The speaker further emphasises the political aspect of the centre’s staff training:

**Int 4 Ext 1**
So we put all this together, the political side of the staff training and the side of women in need for help. They need a place to go so we launched the housing project.

The housing project was therefore generated from the CADM staff’s political training and the need for women seeking shelter. While the secret house itself offers shelter, the offices where the initial contact takes place have the feature of polymorphic spaces discussed above. They seek to recreate the comforts of a domestic environment:

**Int 4 Ext 4**
This is the new head office; we are here since 1990, as we needed different spaces. In fact, there are more enclosed rooms for consultations; there is a kitchen in case women arrive with their children. They can take a break and use it. Moreover there is a sofa bed so if children have to sleep or women are unwell they can rest. Here we have two floors.

The new, bigger space in via Piacenza allows CADM to activate solidarity and practice relationality among women by helping them free themselves from, and psychologically cope with, violence.

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62 Recently, after proposals to the Council, they were awarded three more apartments.
The practice of relationality among women is compatible and complementary to the ethics of care\(^\text{63}\) and the kind of space they generate. In the case of violence, there is an inverted shift from the initial assumption on the *atopia-topia* path. In this case, the path is not from *atopia* to *topia*, but circular: it starts with a difficult *topia*, to a care-intensive *atopia* and finally back to a renewed *topia*. Vulnerable women within a family nucleus have difficulty breaking the cycle, which involve issues of economical, psychological and physical abuse. Although uncomfortable, and in many cases violent, this is a place identifiable with the *topos* of the emotionally dependant woman. Thanks to CADM’s help, women in need of help are provided with emotional tools to react to domestic abuse through training and by making them aware of the institutional apparatus available to them.

Before this happens, however, women in need are given a secret place to go to, symbolizing an *atopic* withdrawal which is a non-place (because it is secret).

**Int 4 Ext 2**
*

*Women are in need of enclosed and silent spaces to be able to speak undisturbed. The secrecy is about creating an environment of hospitality.*

Similar to the separatist moment of feminism, the *atopic* non-place of the secret house used to escape male violence is an important moment of re-appropriation of personal freedom. In this sense also, the practice of separatism can also be read as a moment of re-appropriation, but also a moment of collective, rather than personal, freedom. After this self-exploration and identity-building phase, the work of CAMD consists of providing abused women with the information and confidence necessary to use existing legal and support services.

The kind of support offered by CADM incorporates aspects that reflect women-specific modes of interaction, made political by feminism, that are largely inspired by women’s everyday practices, like talking to each other, the ethics of care and the presence of a domestic setting. Spatially, this is reflected, in the case of CADM, in a sort of circular path that goes from the dark place of abuse and violence to the non-place of care aimed at providing the emotional tools to re-appropriate the *topos* of legal help. The *polis* and its institutions represent in this case the new boundaries to appropriate a renewed citizenship offered by CADM to its users.

\(^{63}\) See Chapter 7 for insights on the ethic of care on urban matters.
6.3.3 Periphery versus centre: the role of Mondodonna

The ways in which Milanese women can be active citizens do not necessarily move along a route delineated by feminism but, as in the case of Mondodonna, can arise by solidarity and associational territorial groups prioritizing women’s needs. Like Mondodonna, there are 103 associations in Milan which are women-only associations and they all contribute to expand the rich civil society environment in Milan. As mentioned above, out of 103 women centres, only one third position themselves in continuity with Milanese feminism and can therefore be defined as movement organizations (see Chapter 3 for a definition of women organizations). Other associations, such as Mondodonna, exclude or bypass the feminist reflection but nevertheless devolve their activity to the local integration and welfare of Quarto Cagnino’s elderly women offering cultural and recreational activities.

Mondodonna is a non-partisan cultural centre promoting a range of recreational activities to integrate lonely housewives, widows and divorced women, mostly elderly women, into the life of Quarto Cagnino. Quarto Cagnino is a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Milan created in the 1970s as a residential area resulting from the post-economic miracle urbanization policies. Quarto Cagnino was more recently classified as one of the so-called quartieri dormitorio [dormitory neighbourhoods] built in response to the lack of housing in urbanizing Milan. From an industrial periphery with manufacturing activities, where housing and the workplace were strictly interconnected, it changed into a modern periphery characterized by an essentially residential quarter.

As Tagliaferri and Mozeglio (quoted in Ciampella Marastoni et al. 2001) suggest, it is not the distance from the centre that characterizes a place as peripheral or less peripheral but its use. The houses that have been built are separated by the ancient borgo and they are dormitory neighbourhoods; and by definition these parts of the city are only used by people who work somewhere else. Quarto Cagnino was an isolated neighbourhood in the Milan periphery and was developed as a consequence of a progressive colonialization of the territory. It consists of “...an agglomeration of urban structures with heterogeneous historical matrices.” (Tagliaferri and Mozeglio quoted in Ciampella et al 2001:25). Through the expansion process of new housing, the identity of the old borgo was lost. Associations such as Mondodonna, among
others, are trying to preserve the identity of the place by integrating old inhabitants with new arrivals. The challenge involves making Quarto Cagnino a place to live, rather than a dormitory neighbourhood, creating “aggregation” spaces that can enhance a sense of belonging through debates and activities where the older inhabitants of the borgo are confronted with new inhabitants.

**Int 19 Ext 1**

*Up to the early 1990s this was a dormitory area lacking services and infrastructures and the dominant habit for women was to stay in. Our objective was to drive women out of the home. In our mandate, we aimed at providing local women with an autonomous space...getting to know each other and finding answers to different objectives and interests.*

As is evident form the above quote, Mondodonna’s space is not polymorphic in a way that seeks a necessary fusion between the public and the private dimensions of its activity. Rather, its aim is taking women out of the home and giving them a sense of community that does not explicitly or intentionally seek to recreate the comforts of home, but rather to forget about it. In this case, the polymorphic dimension of the space rather than being based on a blurring of boundaries between public and private is based on an agglomeration of different kind of publics, such as the exhibition on migrant women. This event attempted to involve migrant women in the community life of Quarto Cagnino through the activities of Mondodonna:

**Int 19 Ext 2**

*For the 8th of March, we organize cultural initiatives. Beyond the usual dances, we organized, for instance, an exhibition on migrant women. We led this initiative in collaboration with Proficua which is an organization composed of migrant women: four of them brought their testimony as migrant women in Italy. (...). We organized a debate on the basis of their experiences, how to get to know each other and we also thought of setting up a school to teach Italian to migrant women.*

Mondodonna organizes a range of different activities in the neighbourhood and activates informal social inclusion policies on a micro-level. This is done through the organization of events, and various other ways to involve the inhabitants of the neighbourhood socially. Moreover, it attempts to create collective action synergies by connecting different institutions and social actors in the organization of conferences and events.
In the case of Mondodonna, *atopia* represents not just the domestic sphere but also the de-personalization and social alienation of the dormitory neighbourhood. *Atopia* here has to be understood in terms of an increased social segregation, therefore Mondodonna (focusing on women without excluding men) enacts an involvement of local women away from the domestic and away from the despersonalized neighbourhood where social relations are weak. The case of Mondodonna exemplifies a women's association that is not politically defined though feminism, but nevertheless aims to integrate the inhabitants of a peripheral neighbourhood, mainly elderly women, into a community of peers.

The kind of spatiality at stake here is interconnected with both the specificities of Milan's urban development and the relationality offered by a collective, shared place, as opposed to the double isolation and loneliness of the dormitory neighbourhood and the domestic sphere.

Concluding remarks

This Chapter has offered a territorial reading of space appropriation by the Milanese feminist movement and the women-led civil society sector. The dialectical tension between centre and periphery and the power struggle that the Milanese social movement has been engaged with over the last 40 years is significant for a specifically feminist perspective on space appropriation. In the case of Milanese women, urban transformation processes have to be read by keeping in mind the ambivalences of public and private, *atopia* and *topia*, and the meaning that their appropriation and use carries with it. The polymorphic, contaminated, porous and multilayered spaces which were increasingly appropriated by Milanese women resemble Massey's (2005) "simultaneity of stories so far" (2005:9). This recalls a definition of space being the product of relations necessarily embedded in material practices, and always unfinished and in the process of being made (Massey 2005).

One of the main findings of the Milanese countercultural and social movement is that the spatial is intrinsically political. Feminism in Milan has added new layers of complexity and openness to the spaces imagined from a countercultural perspective. It is the *topos* of heterogeneity in which the domestic does not constitute a limit to full citizenship and active
participation in the life of the *polis*, and offers a basis to a politics where women are no longer excluded and can make a difference. In the case of LUD, boundedness coincides with the *topia* phase, although the *atopic* phase was also considered as a resource. For CAMD, boundedness coincides with a renewed *topia* where *atopia* is experienced as a constructive phase of identity building. In Mondodonna, a territorial boundedness is offered to elderly women to escape the double exclusion of the house and the peripheral neighbourhood. Each of the three case studies represents, in different ways, a polymorphic space. LUD is a multilayered, porous space practising a hybridization of knowledges by seeping through the predominantly masculine academic knowledge with the material experience originating in the everydayness of Milanese housewives and workers. CAMD and Mondodonna are both care-oriented where public and private boundaries are blurred and re-assembled in different ways.

All the spaces dealt with in this Chapter are separatist spaces and, within the selected case studies, LUD is the more anti-institutional, as it deliberately aims to carry on the criticism of hegemonic masculine knowledge in academia inaugurated in the 1970s. CAMD, from a non-fully-institutional positions works closely with institutions although inspired by theories of radical feminism. Mondodonna does not stem from feminism but, from a non-institutional position, contributes to create urban publics which are women-orientated.

Chapter 6 has therefore applied a range of ways of thinking spatially to Milanese women's collective action. For instance, the issue of borders relates to appropriation, boundedness and unboudedness. Drawing on Paasi (2002), boundedness designates a vertically configured spatial link with the territory which indicates a rootedness and embeddedness between the place and territory in question and is different from later forms of space appropriation where, predominantly, the territorial element is less relevant. Another one of the proposed ways to think spatially has addressed the shift from the private to the public sphere operated by feminism in terms of spatially defined spheres (from absence of a social space in domesticity to having a space in collective action). Finally, the Chapter has looked at the progressive blurring of the boundaries between the private sphere and the public sphere as a way to disrupt the dichotomy private/public and proposed to understand these spaces as polymorphic. The Chapter highlighted the relationship between the changing practices of Milanese feminism and the ways in which space has contributed to their specificity.
In conclusion, although heterogeneous, the spaces of the Milanese women's movement all aim at generating common resources for women. As social actors, their action is outside-directed, and creates collective assemblages around specific mobilizations or projects. The idea of assemblages will be explored further in Chapter 7.
Chapter 7. Everyday networks between dissent and urban governance: the collective action of Milanese women’s organizations

As should hopefully be clear by now, this work takes into account a number of parallel shifts in time, governmental structures and modes of organizing feminist political activism. In particular, it looks at the changing role of women’s spaces, from anti-institutional to extra-institutional which coincides with the shift from a feminist movement to a more diffused form of professionalized feminism after the 1980s. The kind of shifts that these transformations bring, range from a spatially situated and evident boundedness of the women’s centres in Milan, to a more loose, unbounded and abstract spatiality, as I will show here. Changing modes of women-oriented politics are intrinsically connected to new ways of appropriating and experiencing urban space. While previous chapters have shown that the first spaces appropriated by Milanese feminists were mainly bounded (Chapter 6) and mainly anti-institutional (Chapter 2), this Chapter draws on the different kinds of unboundedness that contemporary extra-institutional, networked women’s organizations enact.

As shown in Chapter 3, the move from a strongly centralized and nationalized form of socio-spatial organization embedded in the Keynesian/Fordist organization of production to a more loose, unbounded and wide-ranging composition of civil society actors is exemplified by the rise of women’s services and infrastructures in Milan and their transformations over the last 40 years. In Italy in fact, like the rest of Western Europe from the 1950s onwards, post-war arrangements required a strong role for the state to support the economy and civil society in order to secure conspicuous welfare provision. More recently, the shift from government towards governance practices implied an empowering role for the economy and civil society in the management of the shrinking distribution of state resources (Jessop 2002). Governance is the term that the recent political discourse uses to frame changes in this re-arrangement and de-centralization of state power. However, in the context of this work, it represents both a
socio-political background for the changes at stake in the last 40 years and a target for criticism as a gender blind category to depict such changes. Moreover, the governance argument also contributes to outline a renewed spatial approach: feminist politics act at different scales and their reach transcends merely territorial boundaries. In fact, the collective action of Milanese women’s organizations, triggered by small-scale organizations and other civil society actors, are now increasingly structured as networks, and make use of enhanced communication strategies opened up by the extensive use of Internet and ICTs, and play a significant role in establishing a valuable and innovative alternative to previous governmental decision making.

As outlined in Chapter 3, in most cases the status of contemporary women’s organizations and centres in Milan is formally distant from the institutions of the state. They nevertheless work very closely with local administrations such as Comune, Provincia and Regione Lombardia creating links to the higher education body, the national health service and other targeted services. This happens, normally, through bids to the European Union for funding aimed at retrieving and implementing single projects and offering training opportunities. Single projects combined with social welfare policies and administrative reforms concerning equal participation, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and the policies of time conciliation in urban planning, as will be clear later in this Chapter, are among the most significant interventions fostered by women’s collective agency in contemporary Milan and constitute a challenge to given modes of political participation. The shift from anti-institutional to extra-institutional agents, therefore, can be read in conjunction with other transformations at stake in feminist politics.

In this Chapter, the ongoing change in modes of political action influence ways of appropriating urban space. This is analyzed in the broader context of a shift from government to governance practices, showing how increasingly inclusive, at the same time local and global, governance dynamics are re/shaping the institutional setting of the Italian state and opening up the possibility for an improved democratic, more participatory definition of citizenship. This Chapter aims to highlight women’s associations’ local governance practices in Milan as dynamic civil society relations trying to overcome the gender blindness of both new

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64 See section 7.1 in this Chapter.
65 The inclusiveness does not refer to feminist politics being more inclusive than, for instance, feminist politics of the 1970s. By “inclusive” here I mean that acting within civil society is an easier way for Italian women to influence political decision making processes rather then trying to do it via traditional institutions where they are anyway under-represented.
institutionalist (Les Gales 2002) and neo-structuralist (Brenner 2004, Jessop 2002) approaches to the study of urban governance. Contrary to regulation theories downplaying dissenting voices outside neo-liberal political economy (Jessop 2007), this Chapter seeks to pinpoint the potentially innovative effects of collective action enacted by women’s networks using the example of Milan, where the everyday plays a fundamental role as both a legacy and a resource for feminist practices of space appropriation. The next section offers an understanding of everyday practices inaugurated by women’s movements in Italy and their influence on women oriented, networked and horizontal collective action.

### 7.1 Everyday life politics as a legacy of feminism

Within the field of the social sciences, mainly Lefebvre (1958) and De Certeau (1984) have highlighted how the everyday is the result of constant inventions and adaptation practices, of repeated gestures and improvisations. In this section, it is argued that the integration of everyday life into politics is a legacy of feminism (Italian in this case, but this argument can be extended to Western countries and perhaps at a more global level). This part draws on feminist scholars (Bassanini 2008, Leccardi 2005, Marinelli 2002) to illustrate the existing links between space, which is conceived relationally, and everyday life. In practice, as Gisella Bassanini (2008) reminds us, it has been mostly women, in Italy and elsewhere, who have put an emphasis on the creative character of the everyday and considered the everyday as the starting point of both private and public transformations.

As outlined in previous chapters, women’s movements have transformed everyday life and inter-family relations for many people, the relation with the public sphere and private sphere, production and reproduction, the personal and political. This created a revolution which passed from collective mobilizations to small gestures of material existence (Bassanini 2008). A radical transformation gave voice to all those subjects who had been kept silent over time,

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66 While the neo-structuralist approach emphasizes the uniqueness and specificity of European cities, the neo-institutionalist approach tends to stress the macrostructural impacts of liberalization of urban governance in Western Europe and in North America.
and most of all to women, attributing a value to their biographies and experience and allowing multiple existing differences to emerge.

The radical re-discussion of the everyday as a place of the banal, of the trivial, as a “private” time and without history, and its redefinition as a starting point and end point in the transformation of social power relations proposed by the women’s movement, contributed in a determining measure to transforming the theoretical and epistemological status of everyday life. This was made possible by the non-abstract character of this criticism, its capability to cross all the aspects and dimensions of material organization of life subverting its meanings...The triviality of the everyday, intertwined, for women, to the silence in which the everyday is immersed and separate from the public environments of social life, is forever broken67 (Jedlowski and Leccardi 2003:83).

Carmen Leccardi (2005) shows how this happened when, between the mid 1970s and the early 1980s, new subjects emerged in the form of social movements and in particular the women’s movement. They were the avant-garde of a cultural modernization in Italy, involving education, lifestyles, and expectations which made the everyday become political as emphasised in previous chapters.

The open and collective conflict which characterized the feminist movement became - during the 1980s- individualized through the elaboration of “alternative symbolic codes”, which were considered to be important to represent women in language. The socio-linguistic conflicts of Italian feminism highlighted the everyday as a terrain of challenge and a privileged field to work out how different identities are negotiated. The everyday became a space where women started claiming their difference by actively confronting the social sphere and establishing specific cultural choices in the direction of a renewed relation with institutions and professional life (Leccardi, 2005). As will became clear, the importance of the everyday for reworking existing power relations, introduced by the experience of the feminist movement and the new synergies created by a gender-sensitive civil society, has the potentially innovative effect of connecting local authorities, private entrepreneurial state actors and individuals.

Everyday life is also central to the Italian field of *time oriented urban* policies proposed in 1989 by a women’s group internal to the PCI (Italian Communist Party) (Belloni and Bimbi

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67 Author's translation.
Time oriented urban policies are an attempt to plan cities in a more sensitive way by some Italian municipalities, including Milan. This aims to make compatible the timing of everyday life and the actual opening times of services, public administration, shops and so on. In time oriented politics, time is considered as a resource. For instance, there are "time banks" (banche del tempo) made available for people to collectivize their free time. In its initiators’ original conception, time oriented politics contribute to the construction of a culture and feminine genealogy of the urban project (Bassanini 2008). To project cities "with care" is one of the legacies of a women-specific approach to urban planning (Bonfiglioli 1995). The call for an ethics of care in urban planning, in fact, comes from the legacy of women’s genealogy in care and responsibility as Annalisa Marinelli (2002) explains in *Etica della cura e del progetto* [Ethics of care and project]. Marinelli’s works explains how the ethics of care can be applied to the city, by implementing policies which are attentive to different needs and temporalities, including the ones of those women who are involved in both paid employment and the care of the family. Their needs are different from those of other women in different circumstances and, generally speaking for the Italian case, to those of men.

The ethics of care, the legacy of a material skill learnt by women in the everyday of the private sphere, can also be looked at as a resource and not just as an aspect of the gender division of reproductive roles which forced women into the spatial segregation of the home. Time oriented policies are perhaps the most policy-oriented outcome of the philosophy of the everyday. They are based on the idea that all subjects, including women, old people and children, represent a resource and as such they are to be taken into account in the processes of construction of urban territory and in the ways in which society is organized. As Bassanini (2008) recalls, this implies a cross-eyed look, which looks at Europe without forgetting the conditions of the pavement in via Gorizia.

Most importantly for this work, the everyday is the privileged terrain for the creation of networks. An important characteristic of Milanese women’s organization networks is underlined by both Melucci’s (1999) and Mische’s (2003) account of network interaction. Networks are

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69 The psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982)’s work addresses the ethic of care as a kind of moral outlook that emphasizes solidarity, community and caring about one’s special relationships. This specifically "care view" of morality has been ignored or trivialized because women were, traditionally, in positions of limited power or influence.
submerged in the everyday sphere of private relations, and they emerge on the surface during the transient periods of mobilizations around specific political campaigns or projects. Moreover, the structure of the network is segmented, reticular, multifaceted (see also Gerlach 1973) where:

(Th)ese links become explicit only during the transient periods of collective mobilization over issues which bring the latent network to the surface and then allow it to submerge again in the fabric of daily life. The solidarity is cultural in character and is located in the terrain of symbolic production in the everyday life (Melucci 1996: 115).

As Melucci eloquently argues, in networks individual identity and collective action merge together, as the solidarity behind a mobilization is inseparable from the everyday affective and communicative modes of the single individuals forming the network. Western women’s movements have brought the everyday into their political practices and the embedded genealogy of the ethics of care is what is mostly distinctive of relational modes of networking, mobilizing and inhabiting the public sphere.

The next section will look at the ways in which Milanese women’s organizations appropriate the unbounded space of relational networks.
7.2 Appropriating unbounded space: women’s organizations as networks

In Milan, feminist strategies of space appropriation evolved from anti-institutional to extra-institutional. This means that, from the separatist oppositional location of their politics, Milanese feminists have gradually occupied new positions which are also used to challenge hegemonic power. However, these strategies do not rest any more on necessarily spatially situated locations in the city but consist of organizational forms that are to be understood as unbounded as their activity ranges from local projects to far reaching activities, as will be clear in the next sections and from the case studies in this Chapter. As we have seen so far, for the appropriation of more or less bounded and unbounded spaces, everyday life plays an important role. Those involved, such as the managers and activists of women’s organizations, actively contribute to this process, which is the starting point for the transformation of social relations and of gender differences.

As in other Western European countries, in Italy the power of the national state, policy formation mechanisms and the nature of socio-political struggle have been changing drastically in the last 40 years as a response to both exogenous and endogenous pressures in post-industrial, advanced capitalist societies. Contemporary organizations in Milan, like the feminist centres of the 1970s listed in Chapter 3 and mapped in Chapter 6, changed their political features according to changes in government structure. Global and domestic changes have had different impacts in the vertical re-shaping of power relations among national states and regional, provincial and urban governmental tiers. The resulting governance practices highlight an increasingly evident contrast: on the one hand formal, state-based, arrangements are hierarchical and result in top-down decision-making processes. On the other hand, governance measures are negotiated horizontally through more informal conventions of representation, delegation, accountability and control (Giersig and Beaumont 2006).

Urban governance defined as a set of increasingly horizontal political practices is useful to understand changing feminist strategies of space appropriation in Milan. The fact that governance also creates an increase in transversal (less centralized) decision making has been criticized for its lack of a centrally guaranteed democratic process; however, it opens up the potential for a new way of appropriating the unbounded space of the networks. According
to the first, critical perspective, Swingedouw (2005) as well as Universidad Nomada\textsuperscript{70} (2008), sees governance as a device that neutralizes the political. Governance practices in fact dangerously risk by-passing the former, democratically acknowledged ways of setting rules and exercising power as I pointed out in Chapter 3. Moreover, governance is accused of reflecting the neo-liberal organization of cities (Universidad Nomada 2008:3) contributing to the production of new regulations, restrictions and segmentations which have the effect of isolating and dividing subordinate groups in a way that produces a negatively conceived “government of difference”.

Another way of looking at it is to evaluate the potential of the merging of public and private spheres and the new space of possibilities represented by the non-regulated area stemming from informal urban governance practices. This is possible, for instance, by reflecting on the capabilities of collective action, such as the one enacted by the women’s movement, to actually inhabit the space opened up by the current, possibly just temporary, normative void mentioned above (consisting in a lack of regulatory framework due to increasingly informal decision making processes). This includes these spaces where the private and public divide has finally been blurred\textsuperscript{71}. The diverse range of activities of women’s organizations in Milan is a clear example of this extra-institutional reshuffling. In Milan, through collective action, women’s organizations challenge the established codes, in Melucci’s (1996) sense, towards a more participatory, less hierarchical, counter hegemonic and oppositional way of operating political change at a material level as much as at a symbolic one. Legitimate means, or, better said, the means made possible by capitalist societies in their most contemporary form of urban governance, are used to achieve gradual change involving ways of thinking about participation, political practices and initiatives to challenge a still largely patriarchal society.

Milanese women’s organization networks are unbounded spaces as their institutional boundaries are not set; they are a place where public and private are increasingly merging thanks to the achievements of women’s movements over the last 40 years. The appropriation of unbounded spaces hence concerns inhabiting the new domains opened up by recent

\textsuperscript{70} Universidad Nomada is a collective based in Barcelona.

\textsuperscript{71} Also Newman (2005) points out that governance theories cross the boundaries of state and society, public and private, economic and civil society. Governance terrain is fertile for informal flows of influence based on interpersonal relationships (Newmann 2005) setting up a tension between what is regulated by the state and what is not.
political shifts in urban governance and the creation of networks which are based in the everyday space of personal relations. In Milan, the horizontal, non-hierarchical aspects of specifically feminist political practices have also left a legacy which is intertwined with one left by the integration of the everyday into politics addressed above. What has changed in Milanese feminism that has brought about new forms of spatial politics are the ways in which networks constitute and interact.

Women's organizations in Milan create submerged and informal networks that emerge according to individual projects at stake. These represent new ways of appropriating unbounded space and introduce the idea of topological space which will be analyzed in the next section.

7.2.1 Women organizations: the topology of everyday networks

This section deals with the kind of spatialities that Milanese women's organizations enact. They differ from the ones based on scale and it is suggested that governance practices contribute to configuring contemporary women's spaces as unbounded. Collective mobilizations, as well as governance arrangements, give rise to new organizational forms which are different from the traditional categories of collective action (as the ones, for instance carried out by political parties and trade unions) and therefore delineate an analytical discontinuity between new modes of collective action and those of the past (Melucci 1996). Alberto Melucci's (1996) analysis is important, once again, for its contribution to contemporary knowledge on social movements based on the Italian experience. Moreover, it has shown that collective action is linked with identity issues and is therefore based in the private sphere and, at the same time, in the conventional realm of politics. According to Melucci's analysis, contemporary movements have generated conflictual actors, forms of action, and issues which are extraneous to the traditional institutions of political representation. They represent a vehicle for new demands which are based on identity conflicts. As a consequence the state has been going through a process of re-adaptation to respond to new forms of institutions, associations and civil society actors which are active in the process of re-spatializing and rescaling state power.

The former rigid and mostly centralized state control of institutions, policies and practices is being replaced by a more displaced or de/centered idea of the state. As Neil
Brenner (2004) makes clear in his wide-ranging study on urban governance, a heterodox and multidisciplinary approach is needed in order to grasp the complexity of reconfiguring economic, political, social and cultural processes. Private and everyday life has entered the public sphere not just as instances of a more distributed participation, but as a response to the increased inclusion of questions of identity and difference in the political debate. At the same time, welfare responsibilities and tasks have been reallocated in the private and domestic realm of familial relations, making it difficult-in a changing institutional setting- to clearly distinguish the boundaries of the public sector, public services and public provision (Clarke 2004).

Women’s organizations in Milan as non-state and civil society actors are involved in the managing and delivery of social, economic and cultural activities. This process implies the downscaling of centralized state power to local structures interacting with intermediate institutional powers such as Comune, Provincia and Regione, which themselves are also engaged in mediating and implementing European social policies at a local level. The re-scaling process which neo-structuralist theories usually refer to also implies an up-scaling towards the European Union as the case of women’s organizations in Milan clearly shows. The vertical re-scaling of decision-making contrasts with the decentralization rhetoric, typical of the governance debate, according to which de-centring usually implies handing over to lower tiers of the central state while in effect here the process involves a supra-national institution (the EU). However, the combination of upwards and downwards re-scaling does not necessarily contrast with horizontal governance arrangements (Vacchelli 2006).

While Brenner (2003) has relativized scale and reinterpreted it as a relational, rather than a hierarchical phenomenon (Painter 2008) John Allen and Alan Cochrane (forthcoming) and Allen (2009) follow a different line of enquiry in which the intrinsic hierarchical organization inscribed in the concept of scale is no longer a useful interpretative analytical tool. Instead, they offer a topological interpretation of the government-governance shift and its geography of state power. In contrast to the vertical geography of scale, they propose a reading based on topological thinking. This is based on reach as opposed to the reification reflected in the metaphorically high position of the state’s claim to spatial authority over a given territory:

If we wish to avoid this reification, the solution is not to shift to a horizontal as opposed to a vertical axis of political practice, but to trace the different lines of authority, negotiation and engagement, and how they criss-cross one another in terms of their distinctive rhythms and spatial practice. The emergent
assemblage - such as the current political arrangements (...), represent an unstable power formation in the making (Allen and Cochrane forthcoming: 26)

The idea of assemblage has a clear Deleuzian echo and in Allen and Cochrane (forthcoming) it assumes a geography-specific kind of meaning. Allen and Cochrane propose to subvert the necessarily dichotomous vertical/horizontal configuration of possible institutional or extra institutional networking. Their suggested topological reading of different lines of authority, negotiation and engagements is crucial to the understanding of the relational, communicative and networking practices of Milanese women’s organizations. This insight is also helpful in situating women’s organizations in the governance debate to see how they contribute to processes of re-spatializing/rescaling contemporary urban practices in Milan.

The existence of women’s organizations in Milan in reality reflects the possibility of mapping out their activities and the flow of their interactions, engagements, the ways in which they mobilize the public through cultural initiatives or more structured activities aiming at specific goals. While part of contemporary women’s organizations in Milan is committed to implement European politics of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming at a local and national level, others organize debates and training. By accessing European funds they often create synergies among universities, associations and professional environments. Institutional figures such as consiglieri di parita’ [parity advisors]72 have been created to check that policies of gender mainstreaming are implemented within work places. Some other organizations work at a more informal level networking, on an everyday basis, with existing groups, associations and collectivities of various kinds. Their activity, centered on women’s politics in and outside institutions, forms a continuous criss-cross of social relations, to recall Allen and Cochrane’s expression, in terms of distinctive rhythms and spatial practice in the city giving shape to varying assemblages. They are to be understood as topological space as explained above.

One of the results achieved by these networked activities73 is to foster women’s targeted social inclusion and equal opportunity policies. They enact a kind of participation through networks which are close to forms of participatory democracy. Within the associations,

72 Grazia Porro, interview with the author (2006)
73 Literature on networks which relevant for this Chapter includes Mische (2003), Gould (2003), Knox, Savage and Harvey (2006).
professionals coming from different sectors collaborate transversally with private and public institutions reaching within and beyond Milan. While these multiple networked flows of interaction are unbounded to a specific place and in fact transcend it, women’s organizations in Milan contribute to shaping a public sphere in which participation is enacted. As Newman puts it, by drawing citizens into more direct and involved relationships with governance practices, renewed ways of collaborating and participating may encourage the production of new forms of governable subjects. The new spaces which are opened in this process may form points around which social identity and agency is mobilized (Newman 2005).

In other words, building a more participatory relationship between renewed state practices and citizens should open up opportunities for the enactment of novel social identities. Therefore, communities could also become a newly significant site of governance, as Newman (2005) puts it, at the same time as the array of service providers become a site in which citizens actively replace functions which were previously considered an exclusive domain of the state. This new configuration and a changing location of power raise questions about the public sphere and the new ways in which it is delineated.

The conflicts at stake in these kinds of mobilizations are not an issue of control over immediate and material resources and advantages; rather they are about the fundamental nature of social production itself. In Melucci’s words:

what is at stake is the possibility of giving different form to, and profoundly reorganizing, the structure and goals of the appropriation of social resources. In this sense, antagonistic conflict strikes at the heart of the cultural foundations of a society (1996: 38).

As in the above quote, the antagonistic stance of feminist politics recently changed and became a way to reorganize the structures and goals of the (material) appropriation of social resources by women’s organizations. The level at which feminist conflictual politics take place is, however, also symbolic, as the campaigns, mobilizations, initiatives and events, through institutional or less institutional means, concern the fundamental identity of the actors. Therefore, Italian women’s representation in state institutions, and in a more broadly conceived public sphere, becomes a symbolical achievement of their identity affirmation according to Melucci. As mentioned in Chapter 3, an emerging, networked, form of collective action is involved in “shifting cultural codes” through mobile and changing assemblages of
communicative coalitions creating urban governance practices in Milan in terms of wide-ranging, horizontally developed sets of social relations.

In summary, this section has defined the spatial unboundedness of women's organizations by suggesting that topology and networks, rather than a scaled reading of women's organization interactions, offers a more fruitful theoretical approach to understand their governance practices. The welfare-based implications of this process will be discussed in the next section.

7.2.2 Italian state and female citizens: a liaison dangereuse

The gender-neutral social contract established in governance results in ambivalent and contradictory effects in the regulation of the state-citizen relationship. As shown above, through governance it is acknowledged that the processes of governing take place in families, workplaces, communities and other extra-institutional politics. For this main reason, the governance process has a lot to contribute to debates in feminist analysis that have questioned the implications of the public/private divide and have studied modes of political interaction which are alternative to the ones regulated by the state (Newman 2005). In Milan, feminist strategies of urban activism aimed to provide collective services oriented to respond to women's contextual needs, offering women-friendly alternatives to an inadequate centralized state service provision. Women's organizations in Milan, in fact, diffused from the early 1990s, mainly focused on providing an alternative to scarce social services provision, enhancing women's participation in formal and informal ways and on recreating social bonds between people and their communities⁷⁴.

The shift from vertical, paternalistic state based arrangements to more horizontal political practices happened gradually. From the 1970s onwards in capitalist countries, social economy initiatives were initiated as a reaction to the crisis of the mass-production system and

⁷⁴ During the institutional restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, a growing unemployment crisis, therefore instability on the labour market and the loss of protection by the welfare state were all conditions, which fostered the creation of worker-owned cooperatives, insertion of formal and non-formal elements at the level of state organization, the insertion of market and non-market oriented production and valorisation of goods and services (Mouleart and Ailenei 2005).
as a response to changing production needs. Along with well organized social movements, a range of not-for-profit organizations, social cooperatives and collective services with social solidarity objectives sought to provide alternatives for increasingly missing social services (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005). In the 1980s the state sought to appropriate issues and modes of political action originated in the experiences of social movement struggles of the 1970s, as for instance happened in Italy with the institutionalization of the feminist movement issues regarding health in consultori familiari (Vacchelli 2008) and feminist practices such as separatism took the form of a modernizing rationale, as outlined in Chapter 3.

Patterns of social change have increasingly confronted the legitimacy of the hierarchical and paternalistic relationship between the state and the citizen (Newman 2005). Newman (2005) assumes that new modes of state provision, for which women's groups may have campaigned over the years, become entangled with regulatory practices that have the effect of accommodating bureaucrats and social elites. However, in the case of women's organizations in Milan the space they appropriate is the extra-institutional realm, as is evident from the administrative status of organizations.

Centralized and gender-biased provision of services failed to establish collective services which could alleviate women of their double work load, both at home and mainly in the tertiary sector -ranging from market to the state, embracing volunteering, self-help and domestic economy. These are the circumstances that triggered the emergence of civil society actors as an intermediate space between individual citizens and the institutions of social life. On the one hand, women are fully recognized as citizens entitled to take part in public space, broadly conceived, including paid work, politics and community life. On the other hand,

75 As Newman (2005) clearly points out, services previously provided by the state (including care) are being recommodified into the marketplace or decommodified into households or communities. As a consequence the growth of employment in the personal and social services could only take place at the expenses of increased inequality because of the productivity gap between goods-producing and service sectors. This is likely to have a negative impact on the value that is placed on women's labour, since such jobs typically represent a marketised version of conventional domestic tasks" (quoting Esping Andersen, 1999, p.104). Moreover, the process of marketising domestic and care work produce new chains of interdependencies that flow across national borders, especially between Europe and its former colonies or between northern and southern nations. The capacity of many women in Western and Northern Europe to pursue a career is often dependent on immigration which supplies/ drives the women's labor force in the marginal economy of commodified care services. These women are unlikely to have access to the benefits afforded to those in the mainstream labour force, including access to periods of decommodification in relation to sickness, holidays, the birth and care of their own children and, indeed, retirement. The inevitable result is new divisions, not only between women and men, but also between women workers in the rapidly emerging globalized post-industrial (service) societies.
however, this assumption fails to explore the question of the role of men in care and domestic labour, leaving the problem of women’s double commitment unresolved (Newman 2005). In some cases, feminist political practices were absorbed by institutionally negotiated areas of state interventions, with the questionable effect of recognizing and reinforcing women’s larger responsibilities in the field of the care for the elderly and for the young (Vacchelli 2008).

As discussed above, welfare arrangements in Western countries are ambiguous and reflect contradictory views if looked at from a gendered perspective as they offer a margin where easy formulations about public and private, embedded in welfare states, can be dismissed. For instance, the government’s target of full employment is in evident contradiction with the cuts in welfare expenses and the increasing responsibilities being relocated into family networks, communities, private work and care (Newman 2007) that in Italy, for instance, necessarily involves an increased workload for both housewives and women in paid employment. Moreover, often migrant women’s work privately replaces the scarcity of welfare and services provision. As a result, these gendered, racial and class-specific identities who take on the social role of care become the surface of increasing tensions between citizenship, care and work.

In Milan, women’s organizations’ collective action offer a way to overcome the problematized, contested and deeply political set of boundaries concerning what is private and what is public within the arena of the state and the tensions that arise from a gender blind and “one-size-fits all” model of welfare provision. The ways in which women’s organizations have offered alternatives to missing social services are, for instance, by promoting and offering training to increase women’s participation in political institutions and by introducing a wide range of everyday practices into politics, as will become evident in the case studies analysed in Part 7.3 of this Chapter. The complex interplay of these historical, social and political factors have contributed to opening the way towards more horizontal, extra institutional and civil society based forms of political action.

As will become evident in the next section, the feminist legacy on contemporary modes of political thought and collective action is exemplified by the range of relational and participative political practices enacted by women’s organizations in Milan.
7.2.3 Skewing the institutional: a new space for women's collective action?

Dynamics of collective action\(^7\) are useful to analyze the existing tensions (and the problems) raised by a gender-biased welfare provision and the activity of women's organizations in Milan. Collective action as a relational dimension of collective identity is defined by Melucci (1996) as a set of social practices (i) involving simultaneously a number of individuals or groups (ii) exhibiting different morphological characteristics in a contiguity of time and space, (iii) implying a social field of relationships and (iv) the capacity of the people involved in making sense of what they are doing (1999:20). In collective action there is a mutual constitution of actors and systems in which the external environment provides the set of opportunities and constraints and also contributes to define collective actors (Melucci 1996). This section aims to clarify the role of women's organizations as primary actors of civil society's collective action in Milan and tackles the role of civil society associations within the Italian state\(^7\).

The recent emergence of third-sector associations in Italy has been read as a response to the crisis of the welfare state (IREF 1992-93). Due to a fiscal crisis in the early 1990s, Italian welfare underwent a qualitative crisis that made it difficult to offer social support in a way which was not too bureaucratic or following the "one-size-fits-all" criteria. When based on providing services and assistance, associations in Italy have often had a substitutive role to replace the faults of insufficient public structures. In some cases this happened in opposition to the state, in other cases by opening up the opportunity of an intervention which was complementary to the public one. However, it would be reductive to ascribe the relationship between public institutions, associations and services to a limited welfare provision. In reality, citizens' growing discontent towards public inefficiencies is geared against the whole range of

\(^{76}\) Another important work on collective action is Mancur Olson's (1971) *The logics of collective action* which is, however, less relevant to the study of social movements' collective action.

\(^{77}\) As outlined in Chapter 3, in Italy, welfare policies have largely relied on the family as a provider of individual care and support (Bernini 2007). According to the definition of the Italian welfare state as *familista*, (Ginsborg 1989) the family has often represented a replacement for a poor system of public welfare. The tasks assigned to the family by welfare arrangements (domestic work, reproduction and care related work, with annexed home administration responsibilities) heavily overlapped with women's unpaid and unrecognized role within the family as shown in Chapter 3. Thus, feminists criticized the conservative logics of welfare policies according to which the organization of public services in Milan expected citizen's needs to be met through private and domestic support networks.
public services, offered by the Italian state (IREF 1992-93). When the market of private services does not offer a solution to this problem, voluntary organizations or not-for profit ones, as in the case of the majority of women's organizations in Milan, play a relevant role.

Although women's organizations are not mentioned among the existing categories of associations, the IREF report on Associations in Lombardy (1992-93) provides a typology of existing associations such as the area of social solidarity, the area of civil society commitment and the area of free time and cultural activities. In Milan, women's contemporary organizations belong to any one of the three areas, often encompassing one or more elements of the other two. Ideally, associations politically represent the bulk of interests (see Pringle and Watson 1992) which do not benefit from permanent protection in the political system (as for instance workers in trade unions). In this case, services offered by associations are alternative to those offered by the state. An example of this in the field of Milanese women's organizations is not just the woman specific health care system offered by consultori familiari in Italy, but also those associations which offer training or work to implement gender mainstreaming policies in workplaces, such as IRENE, as will became clear later. Another role of contemporary women's associations in Lombardy, according to the IREF report's definition, is that of fostering political representation.

The progressive crisis of the Italian party political system, as outlined in the IREF report (1992-93), happened simultaneously with the decline of the Catholic and the Marxist subcultures in which there was a strong identification between belonging to a party, religion or political ideology and other spheres of social belonging. The decreased possibility for traditional political parties and trade unions to represent citizens in highly differentiated societies opened up room for manoeuvre to new kinds of political organizations: associations became not just a way of organizing but a vehicle to produce services, and also of representing politically new interests and orientations. In other words, associations gradually replaced political parties as elements of mediation between the citizen and institutions.

The previous centralized state's attitude oriented towards an early capitalistic saving on social services negatively influenced women's relation to the city as a whole, making it difficult for them to interact dialectically with the territory and its institutions. Because of a polarized gender division within the family, welfare state provision in post-war Italy assured
family needs by neglecting individual needs (1976 anonymous unpublished source\textsuperscript{78}) as a consequence of the minimal implementation of social policies. The state could provide only some of the basic services such as health service and education, and guarantee a functioning production/consumption cycle. Yet feminist struggles to build alternative primary and secondary social services were intended to overcome Italian women's enduring condition of domestic isolation and their discursive exclusion from patriarchal institutions and the juridical system.\textsuperscript{79} Women's collective action aims to bridge the gap between a limited gender-blind welfare provision and the need for women's increased participation in institutional and extra-institutional politics.

After having discussed the tensions between the gender-blind Italian welfare provision and the role of women organizations' collective action within it, a question that remains open is what role women's organizations in Milan play in the governance debate and how they reposition themselves in the new governance arrangements. The three case studies I outlined will hopefully help to clarify this by highlighting, respectively, different aspects: a governance-based activity in the case of IRENE; an organization, like Proficua, that takes up the task of replacing and transforming missing public services in a multicultural perspective and, finally, lemanja', a movement-based organization whose collective action expands its reach far beyond the Italian borders.

\textsuperscript{78} Collettivo Donne Architettura, "I servizi sociali" (44-54), unpublished document at archive Fondazione Badaracco busta 29/fascicolo 1.

\textsuperscript{79} Until 1968, only 40 years ago, article 559 of the previous Penal Law Code would punish only female adulterous behaviour and not that of the male. Moreover, it is only with the introduction of the article no. 442 of 5 August 1981 that the "honour killing" [delitto d'onore], a reduced punishment for murders committed at the expense of female members of the family in cases of adulterous behaviour, was abolished by the Italian penal law.
7.3 Looking within and beyond Milan. Three cases

Contemporary shifts in feminist politics have produced new forms of unbounded networked activities. While in Chapter 6 autonomy and separation gave rise to territorial embeddedness and experiments with appropriation, here collective action and topologies of reach, inscribed in governance practices, gave rise to more unbounded kinds of spatialities. The three cases I discussed reflect different kinds of collective action organized topologically. Moreover, they reflect the integration of everyday issues into politics and their joint action has contributed to configure and shape Milanese urban governance. For instance, the case of IRENE is useful for showing how an organization, focussed on the politics of gender mainstreaming, can interact with both institutional and non institutional fields, ranging from European Commission to universities and other civil society organizations. This happens through the creation of assemblages composed, each time, by different agents (institutional or extra-institutional) creating networked governance practices. The second case of Proficua is particularly useful to illustrate the tensions addressed above between missing or inadequate service provision and the question of migrant women in Milan. The third case, lemanja’, illustrates an extremely wide and heterogeneous topology of reach which is close to a social movement’s specific form of collective action. The three cases selected embrace the definitions illustrated above and each of them is particularly appropriate to highlight their specific aspects of governance in the case of IRENE, social services in Proficua, and topology of reach in lemanja’.

The interviewees in this Chapter are the manager of the organization IRENE, a member and co-founder of Proficua and the web editor of the website of lemanja’, who is also an activist and organizes feminist campaigns via the internet. I contacted all the interviewees via email and subsequently via telephone after finding their contact details in a guide of women’s associations in Milan (2005-2006). The interviews with IRENE and Proficua took place in their respective head-quarters, while the interview with lemanja’ took place in the home of the interviewee. All of the interviewees welcomed me with enthusiasm and shared with me facts, feelings and thoughts about the organizations they contributed to create and sustain.
7.3.1 IRENE, Milanese governance in action

IRENE is the acronym for Initiative, Research, Experience for a New Europe, it was created in 1991 with the intention of diffusing, at a local and national level, European policies and, specifically, equal opportunity policies. From 1991 it operated in Milanese territory by implementing European policies and working on projects directly with Brussels or the ESF fund.

IRENE’s programmes and initiatives in the European Union include the promotion of equal opportunities through gender mainstreaming and the implementation and development of projects in the areas of human rights and social inclusion, the prevention of trafficking for sexual exploitation, actions aimed at facilitating the employment of migrant women in Italy and anti-discrimination actions. Equal opportunity and equal political representation are also priority aims of the association IRENE, which fosters women’s equal access to political, economic and social life.

Int 20 Ext 13

We provide courses for public bodies and private through modules and when we are asked to design a project we do it in conjunction with other structures or we do it ourselves. At the moment we are concluding a course promoted by the Milan Council and the Ministry of Equal Opportunity on Women/Politics. “An opportunity in search for parity” follows the objectives of IRENE, it’s not a course based on theory but it’s a course to bring women closer to European political issues. It enables them to understand how women are defined by the European Union, what equal opportunities are, gender mainstreaming, positive actions, gender budgeting on the practical side and drag these women closer to politics by bringing them to the various institutions, in particular the provincial councils not just the regional ones. The course is open to the whole council’s territory, from the student of political science to the councillor.

Beyond the kind of activities listed above, IRENE promotes cooperation in the process of enlargement and integration of Eastern European countries into Europe, including the promotion of communitarian rights. Access to the “knowledge society” (consisting of new technology and digital divide issues) is also part of the main aim of IRENE.

According to the analysis provided above, IRENE enacts strategies of urban governance according to the scale rhetoric typical of the governance debate. This is evident from the vertical negotiations with the European Union through the implementation of European
projects, but the kinds of negotiations IRENE is involved in are also horizontal, as it is evident from the interviewee’s words which reveal the origins and the aims of the association:

*Int 20 Ext 2*

> From the association’s conception to now we have merged a variety of professions with different studies with the intent of working on the territory with public bodies and private to diffuse European Policies and build Europe from below. Currently we’re working on a project in which public and private institutions request our involvement / expertise in the field of project management. Project management is a way of highlighting the political agenda of European policies at a national level to build Europe from ground up which is evident now as we all know.

Constituted by professionals, IRENE represents the bulk of interests which could be summarized, according to the classification provided in section 7.2.1 in this Chapter, as social solidarity with underrepresented Italian women. It consists of a civil society commitment to implement equal opportunity policies in the workplace by organizing university courses and training in order to increase women’s awareness of political institutions and their chances to actively become part of them. The above quote underlines IRENE’s work connection with its territory through public bodies and private ones. This territorially rooted intervention does not contradict its strong focus on Europe. IRENE actuates public/private kinds of interactions that have to do with implementing policies at a local level and in particular consultancies, private exchanges between private enterprises and universities.

*Int 20 Ext 12*

> The other topic I was discussing just now is that of professional training which is the result of an acquired know how overtime, so what we are proposing is to raise awareness of IRENE’s work and its methods, the diffusion of policies in the field and technique of project management and systematization of know how. Built over time, the training can be targeted towards people who occupy leading positions in the field of civil society and non-profit rather than administrators and councillors of public institutions and then we can diversify according to specific requests.

By involving both private and public actors, IRENE enacts a series of activities which are aimed at creating scalar links, structured vertically, between Europe and the local level as it is evident in the following quote:
Int 20 Ext 3
Overtime, various people working for us, have responded to the changing topics and have specialized in specific areas of interest. The activities, as I was telling you, are that of project management. IRENE can decide if implementing projects which are within the area of its own interest, so we do reply to calls of the European Union or we offer consultancies to get funds from Europe to implement local policies.

Although the topics have changed overtime, the approach has always been one of explaining and making the logics behind IRENE's work evident and known:

Int 20 Ext 6
The work of IRENE is to interpret the language of European financing and to reveal the logics of the funding. When people arrive to access funding it means that there has been a long process of programming of European politics so there is a very definite reason why the application for funding is needed so this kind of work is ambitious...these are the ambitions, but when we work we have to clash with the reality of the everyday although the fil-rouge here is what motivates and drives people who work within IRENE, the shared vision and objectives is really present.

IRENE mediated the contents of European financing by explaining the logic of the funding to its co-bidders. While the work is ambitious and the ambitions sometimes clash with the reality, the project functions as an internal solidarity liaison within the member of the association. Internally, the solidarity link between the members of the association is built through the sharing of knowledge. Externally, the process works as a network:

Int 20 Ext 5
As I told you the work of IRENE, beyond working on the policies is that of networking at a European level and at the local level of the Region Lombardia or on the Italian territory according to the kind of projects we implement. When we think of a project or propose a project to the region or the region calls us for consultancies our approach is always to diffuse the last guidelines and to work according to what is the logics of gender mainstreaming and diffusion of policies.

From the quote above the kind of networking that IRENE enacts is clearly structured vertically and according to scale logics, typical of the governance debate as illustrated in section 7.2 (pages 181-183). However, the following quote shows a horizontal dimension of interaction as well as the vertical one.
As I was telling you, both through our activities and projects, IRENE has a structure which constitutes and builds up networks. The kind of work IRENE does is that of weaving together webs and linking the various resources, as we said before, which exist on the territory. The territory is full of resources and is often easier to build a network with someone from Ireland or from Greece rather than between two people living in the same place. This is therefore the objective of the territory-based work, which is to build an interdisciplinary network and put into communication the various resources and institution, and Universities too.

The quote illustrates the topological dimension of IRENE’s action on the territory, which is not just a work oriented to scale but to reach, in which different lines of authority, negotiation and engagement are interlinked in a reticular way. In the quote there is a dialectic tension between territory and network. Building networks on the territory is seen as positive; however it is not always easy to connect resources on the same territory. By contrast, the relational communicative power of networks can be stronger at a distance than in proximity. Networks are, in that sense, unbounded, although the territory is an important dimension to the process.

The hubs of the network are chosen according to the specific project on which the association is mobilizing its resources, for instance in the case of choosing a peer partner association for organizing a conference in Budapest on the European enlargement in 2004:

In 2004 when 10 new countries accessed (meaning: Europe) we were implementing a project with 4 other associations of the 10 countries and we organized a conference in Budapest. We were working with a women’s organization called Mona. We still work together, and we organized that conference to sensibilize public opinion on the “key communitaire” in respect to equal opportunities.

This illustrates well the idea of a mutable assemblage of relations which changes according to the specific project. The multiple, networked, flow is unbounded to a specific place but it transcends it and this changes all the time. In this case the leadership is diffused and the action is collaborative. This enhances the shape of the network which emerges from submerged interests of individual organizations as reticular, segmented, multifaceted and made of diversified units.

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80 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1981) used the term “rhizome” to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation.
In 2003 we were financed by the European Union and this will be a network with more hubs in Europe. We normally consolidate the relationship that we already have but, if we see that in the structure there are possible new resources, we contact these people who correspond to our recruiting objectives of that particular resource. So there are those contracts which are already consolidated overtime and at a European level or we just put people in contact with each other, we are called by the Region Lombardia or someone else and we're asked if there are partners in specific European Regions, we link up the resources between those at a local level and at a European level.

The assemblage takes place according to the political opportunities at stake through both the recruitment of new resources and the valorisation of existing ones. The fact of being able to value the existing resources recalls the work of care and the legacy of the ethics of care, developed over centuries in the private sphere, on women's projects. The question of feminism though, is not explicitly faced by IRENE.

In regard to your interest in the feminist question that emerges form your questions, IRENE works with a practical and direct grasp. There is a difference between people who belong to the previous generation and directly experienced feminism and my own generation which could take it for granted. Thanks to what happened in the 1970s, I can take for granted certain acquired things, I don't know how to express it better, it's not that the question doesn't exist because there is a main focus on the feminist question and to strengthen the gender question simultaneously.

The attention of IRENE to women oriented topics, practices and engagements does not spring directly from feminist ideas, but rather from the previous achievements of earlier generations of feminist work which are now taken for granted. To give IRENE's activity a reading based on Melucci (1999), both its presence on Milanese territory and its topological reach contribute to "shifting symbolic codes" by working on issues related to women's identity and citizenship in contemporary Milan. This happens although IRENE's kind of mobilization does not reflect dissent but conformity with acknowledged and regulated modes of governance interaction.

Collective action? Over time, IRENE has built up a network of collaboration with similar organizations and contacts from other institutions that are located within the European region. The work of IRENE is that of pursuing its own objectives and therefore to snowball effect-
project with very definite aims in a sensitive way. Where, at a European level, there are similar structures we link up informally.

What is worth noting in the above quote is the term “informally” used by the speaker which confirms and re-proposes the debate mentioned in section 7.1 (pages 177-180) about the less regulated in governance networks. Also, the reason why collective action is initiated is, as in point (iii) of Melucci’s definition in section 7.2.3 (page 190), the implementing of a social field of relationships and shared interests and objectives, which, in the case of IRENE, are the politics of gender mainstreaming. Other features, such as involving a simultaneous number of individuals or groups are present in the case of IRENE: the Comune, Provincia, the Lombardy Region, the European Fund, Universities and other training institutions, are all linked through people who are aware of the political implications of their actions (Melucci 1996:20). Through specific modes of political action, a relational dimension of collective identity is enacted by the governance practices mobilized by IRENE.

7.3.2 Migrant women and integration, the challenges of Proficua

Milan is a city where many migrants gather in associations as a way of enhancing visibility in the city and as a space to achieve a recognized form of citizenship. By volunteering in associations, migrants define their identity, sense of belonging, rights and enact forms of collective action (Melucci 1982). From the 1990s onwards, a period of the most consistent migratory flux to Italy, there has been scarce normative regulation of the migration process due to a delay of the Italian state in recognizing the process (Camozzi, 2006). Proficua (Professionalità' Femminile InterCUlturale Associata) was created in 1991 as multicultural cooperative, composed of female professionals from different countries of the world. Women who are active in Proficua are artists, doctors, lawyers, carers, pedagogues, teams of experts that acts in the Italian situation with the objective of supporting other migrant women and children and making social and other services aware of the different needs of citizens from other cultures. Among Proficua’s aim is to facilitate integration, educate to “worldism” (literally translation from Italian “mondialismo”, neologism meaning cosmopolitanism) through courses for cultural facilitators. Moreover, another one of Proficua’s activities consists of the exploration
of specific food habits and traditions as a way to get in touch with different cultures. Among Proficua’s projects there is a house for teenagers, mostly girls, in difficult situations. This project is managed in collaboration with social services including services for migrants who rely on solidarity networks between public and private bodies and institutions which circulate resources and marketing.

Proficua is run by migrant women from South America and offers an arena to think through cultural difference. It enacts forms of collective action by liaising with other organizations and its activities are heterogeneous although its main focus is a critique to a one-size-fits-all service provision. Its multicultural and gendered practices also consist of providing training to social services on cultural diversity. Within the range of Proficua’s activities, there are also research and citizenship practices to help illegal migrants, baby sitting in foreign languages to support bilingualism, translations, travel organization, business and legal consultancies, health, psychological assistance in school, hospitals, consultori and other communities embracing users from different cultures.

*Int 15 Ext 4*
From the first meetings, it emerged that the city of Milan as such would not meet our needs, and this was true both for Italians and for foreigners.

Proficua belongs transversally to the three classified categories of Milanese associations listed above in the IREF report (promoting social solidarity, belonging to civil society and promoting free-time activities). Clearly, social solidarity as one of the main aims of the organization is evident in this field of work:

*Int 15 Ext 1*
Proficua was a working group within the League which was already working on migration. In those years, in order to be able to focus our attention on immigrants in Italy we had to present a motion stating that immigrants were a people, and that therefore they should have been the focus of our work as I told you before on the question of asylum.

Secondly, Proficua can also be classified as an organization that uses civil society as an intermediate space between the individual and the institutional realm. This represents a fertile terrain to re-think identity and citizenship practices (Melucci 1991) focussed on the problems of migration and takes up the role of re-education and training of social services to cultural
diversity. The starting point for this kind of work is acknowledging the existing differences between Italian and migrant women in Milan and think through prejudices, social stigmas and pre-constituted ideas:

**Int 15 Ext 3**

We noticed that there were firstly prejudices among us and towards others, some unbalanced ideas and also some commonalities. We (migrant women) believed that they (Italian women) were attracted to modern things, from technology and that they were emotionally cold. They believed that we were using traditional medicine, we couldn’t use technology and that we could dance and sing....the opposite emerged as they were the years in which the Italians went to naturopaths and to have the horoscopes done and they were against the contraceptive pill. But we were the opposite, the more X-rays, the happier; we were attracted by technology for a very simple reason. In our countries, traditional medicine and traditional remedies belong to poverty; the majority of the population already used them as they were cheap. For us, modernity meant technology and later we had a similar path that Italians had, to look for natural materials, good wood rather than plastic and so we started having the horoscopes done too, no?

By acknowledging prejudices, but also commonalities, it has been possible for the members of the organization to question their social identity as women in Milan. From the above quote, some paradoxes emerge, for instance around the fact that Italian women were more attracted by natural medicine and migrant women (in this case mainly Latino women) were attracted by technology in health. This anecdote highlights the commitment of Proficua to identity issues, thus meeting the second requisite for the definition of the existing categories of associations in Lombardy outlined in section 2 of this Chapter.

**Int 15 Ext 11**

For women migrants we also have a shelter to signpost them to work, they can use existing services. We teach them to integrate into the labour market in a qualitative way for instance through the balance of competences/ skills, CV and maps of where to ask. We also offer them new friendship opportunities.

Proficua assists migrant women in the first phases of integration in Italy and provides professional advice in the field of paid employment and education. Proficua, like IRENE, enacts forms of horizontal and vertical negotiation with the institutions of the country but, unlike IRENE, it has a focus on social services. Not only does Proficua represent a bulk of interests (those of migrant women) which do not benefit from state protection, but it poses itself as an
alternative. For instance, it offers a shelter that provides migrant women advice for employment and also training to enhance the existing social services.

The third category of existing association in Lombardy is the one of free time and cultural activities. For Proficua’s members, cooking becomes not just a way of exchanging stories and cultural aspects through food, but also a means to involve and interest the community and in particular older persons.

\textit{Int 15 Ext 12}  
Cooking is common work in which we exchange recipes and ask the elders of the community to participate, thus working towards valorisation of traditions. Older people were very happy to participate so we adopted it as a method to improve integration.

Cooking belongs to the free time activities of Proficua that, thanks to this aspect, represents an association tout-court meeting the requisites of social solidarity, commitment as a civil society actor and offering free time and cultural activities.

Its goals consist of a criticism to existing “one-size-fits-all” kind of attitude in bureaucratic organization.

\textit{Int 15 Ext 5}  
We realized that schools and hospitals, post offices and police, all the structures that were supposed to elaborate the answers to citizens' needs did not work as everyone was located in a monolithic culture which was fake. They would behave in a fake way as Italy wasn’t one, Italy was something like a constructed idea and would as if the user was homologated to one language, one culture. It would behave as if the user who is in front of you when you go to the post or to the doctor would respond to a unique culture, a culture that doesn’t exist. When on the other side you see people with disabilities, older people, young people, foreign people and from the South of Italy and Milanese, everyone of us corries from different cultures. The worst part was that sometimes we were customer service operators too and we had to pretend to belong to this homologized culture and to a culture that wasn’t our own.

From the above quote it emerges clearly that one-size-fits-all model of welfare state proposed by the Italian government, and discussed in section 2 of this Chapter, does not only apply to gender, but also intersects with cultural, linguistic and ethnicity aspects. In the same direction, as discussed in the first part of this Chapter, private care service is intertwined with gendered and racialized, class-specific identities:
The problem is that the majority of us had higher degrees and qualifications in the country of origin and we had to be servants like many other foreign women over here. The luckiest ones could go and teach their own language so in this way we could integrate in the labour market but with a thousand difficulties. We had to study once again, we had our titles recognized so we thought that we could help other women to access the labour market, by helping them to use the available services correctly and preventing problems rather than using them at the very last minute where there was no other option left.

Migrants are faced with the problem that degrees achieved in their country of origin are not valid in Italy and this nullifies the potential for class mobility offered by education. For this main reason Proficua takes up the challenge of guiding migrant women through the bureaucracy by sharing the experience of those migrant women who first reached Italy and faced these kinds of problems. The aim of Proficua is also to advise migrant women to access the labour market in a more efficient way, when compared to the difficulties of the first migrants in Milan in the mid-1970s.

Among the main concerns of Proficua there is the functioning of social services, how they respond to the challenges of multiculturalism and whether they are able to elaborate polyfunctional responses. Moreover, the user is helped to make a correct and efficient use of the services available. In this way, Proficua presents itself as a resource to advise both social services and the users of the same services to cultural diversity and to articulate and differentiate both the interests and the responses the service is able to give. As Camozzi (2006) underlines, in Italy there was a regulatory delay in recognizing the shift from being a country of emigrants to the new role of being a country of migrants. Public services, as much as institutions, are faced with a normative void.

So we thought of doing a project to transform public services and to help them to elaborate polyvalent answers. So on one hand we had to educate services and the various structures to know other cultures and give polyvalent answers to migrants, in particular to migrant women, as in the first instance they needed to integrate as a qualitative minority.

The interesting concept of “qualitative minority” the speaker refers to is created through cultural values such as education and training. Moreover Proficua’s work is multidirectional as the help is not only directed to migrants, but also to Italians. This occurs through the services becoming multicultural and anti-racist as indicated in the next quote:
Our objectives are not just for foreign women but also Italian women as our aim is to help social services to be intercultural, give polyvalent answers, offer a lot of training, through a series of instruments, courses, programmes, projects to teach people strategies against racism, to communicate with other cultures so we work a lot with Italians.

Proficua works as a private social service and it creates the networks and collective action:

We sell our services, we do projects and we lend it to public bodies. We’ve worked over the years with the Comune di Milano, we offer consultancies and courses, we work with hospitals, borough of the hinterland and consultori.

Proficua is also actively involved in the organizations of events such as the cultural event organized by Mododonna (see Chapter 6) and is an authoritative voice on the question of migrant women in Milan. As is evident from the quote above, Proficua, like IRENE also creates changeable assemblages of political relations according to the different projects it engages with. This forms a variable topological reach in its various set of actions and engagements. According to the collective action definition provided by Melucci (1999) Proficua engages with a set of social practices ranging from training social services to advising migrant women about migration laws. It does this by exhibiting different characteristics, including assistance to individuals and advisory social services. The people involved in it are experts who are engaged with the shifting of dominant cultural codes, in this case not just the ones related to sex and gender but also specific cultural and class diversities.
7.3.3 Dissent, action and the topology of reach: the case of lemanja'

lemanja' is the Brazilian goddess of water. The name of the organization comes from the personal experience of the initiator who worked with Brazilian women during the 1980s.

**Int 12 Ext 8**

A black goddess of African origins strongly represents many aspects of women's oppression, being both a black woman and poor she became one of the fundamental divinities of popular religion in Brasil, and anyway we thought it was good to choose such an image.

lemanja' nowadays is also a website, not just an organization working with people and it tries to build networks of solidarity with feminisms outside Italy. lemanja's internationalist activity ranges from conducting a survey in a Milanese popular neighborhood to work on awareness and solidarity with the Afghan feminist group Rawa. lemanja' was also active in the organization of the Montreal World Women March in year 2000. Inspired by the association in Brazil, lemanja's activities in the Milanese area started in the early 1990s with a previous association voluntarily offering minimal education levels to adults:

**Int 12 Ext 1**

Now I am referring to the previous association to lemanja', let's say about 15 years ago we came to live in this city, shortly after getting settled here we started to build an association with some friends, a mixed group of men and women, called Association of Popular Culture. This association started a course of secondary schools for adults in a popular neighbourhood and from this we kept in touch with women who were interested in continuing along a path of self-training, not with the aim of getting the schooling title but simply for the need to grow up as a group. It became a shared need so for a couple of years we run a self help group in which each woman involved would bring the problems she encountered in her private life starting from the family.

The origins of lemanja' are thus very similar to the kind of work that other Milanese groups such as LUD (illustrated in Chapter 6) offers with education programmes for adults women and the kind of self-help, consciousness raising style groups typical of 1970s Western feminism. However, the approach differentiates itself from the one of 1970s Italian autocoscienza:
Int 12 Ext 2
I had worked for three years with a group of women in Brazil in a peripheral area so we had used the kind of methods which were so diffused in the 1980s. We rebuilt a dynamic called “the timeline of life” which consists of re-calling the first memories of childhood to adolescence, until marriage and parenthood. The challenge they would face was one which is normal in Brazil, when certain dynamics were used to understand how a personal and individual experience has strong links with other women. The mechanisms of oppression are the same ones, so the immediate reaction is individual but the problem is not individual it is collective so the solutions have to be found at a collective level as well, there is a reciprocal psychological strengthening but also collective/unity in a form of organized struggle which is a development of autocoscienza but made according to this method which when compared to the that of 1970s Italy is different to that of 1980s Latin America. The women of popular neighbourhood are often completely illiterate and this kind of work takes a slightly different direction as in reality they are similar to autocoscienza but the psycho-social dimension and the personal one has to do with the family. We seek to have them evolve together so it’s about acquiring the kind of knowledge of the self and of the context and to organize paths of struggle that are at the same time personal and collective.

From the quote above it emerges that the experience with 1990s Milanese women from popular neighbourhoods is enriched by the experience of the interviewee in 1980s Brazil. The experience in Milan is therefore a dissemination of methods that aim to build social movements in similar ways. This takes place through a path which is directed to class awareness and to making women conscious of the situations of deprivation they were subjected to. This is made clear in the next quote where the speaker explains that the association, precursor to lemanja', conducted a door-to-door survey on the need for social services for reproductive health.

Int 12 Ext 3
We created this kind of work also with them and this work led to struggles for the right to reproductive health. We did this work for many years and found out that they had problems with reproductive health such as abortions or even cancer due to lack of prevention. Starting from this we tried to carry out a wider kind of survey though the whole neighbourhood. We worked door-to-door gathering data on these kinds of sanitary issues and from there we made an official report that we then presented to the ASL [local NHS] to obtain prevention services.

The experience narrated above is a fitting example of bottom-up work, rooted in the everyday of local women’s lives, leading to the establishment of a social service which does not come from the centralized state but as a response to grassroots need. Moreover, from the next
quote it emerges that Italian women, from poor peripheral neighbourhoods as recently as the 1990s were not even aware of the kind of social services available to them.

*Int 12 Ext 4*

The situation in terms of prevention was drastic as people who lived in these kinds of neighbourhoods did not even have the educational tools to access this kind of service. So it emerged that the service itself that had to go and put itself forward, find strategies to involve women and let them know what their rights are. Often, formally, the rights are there but there are not any possibilities of access and the obstacles are too strong so we tried to do this work without great success. However, there have been developments, we haven't changed things radically but hope to have at least changed the level of awareness of the women of the neighbourhood only for the fact of having talked to them and for instance raised the awareness of their sanitary needs.

The Associazione Cultura Popolare lost its head office due to the privatization of council houses. Owing to a lack of available space, its activities gradually dissolved.

*Int 12 Ext 6*

We lost our space so the Association of Popular Culture was sold, they were council houses which were privatized, Subsequently, any space that we tried to get into was not accessible. This caused a dispersion of our work and resources and we tried to keep personal relations with some of the women involved but the group hasn't existed for many years.

lemanja’ came out from the ashes of the Associazione Cultura Popolare and it is based in the association leader’s house. The activity is organized from her home computer. So the speaker describes the making of lemanja’.

*Int 12 Ext 9*

When the association was formed we wanted to have a framework of the feminist movements existing in Milan and in Italy at that moment, you find everything on the website anyway. The website wanted to be, and still wants to be a communication tool between groups and associations and networks and should have been helpful to form networks in a fragmented panorama of feminism. It was supposed to be an instrument of auto-education, so as to enable the collation of written material and to translate material on women's movements in Italy but also abroad. We needed to improve our skills and you have to force yourself to keep up to date and give detailed information on things that are not necessarily very clear not even to us at first..

The website, and therefore ICTs, as it emerges in the above quote, is a fundamental tool for letting the activity of the group be known and also a facilitator for the creation of networks. In
order to run the website and keep it updated a series of skills and time resources are necessary. ICTs is what allows lemanja' to build networks.

From this work tout court on networking with feminisms worldwide, gradually the interest started to focus to a specific feminism, that of Rawa (Afghan women):

**Int 12 Ext 10**

So we have on one side a trust established and built up through the relationship with the subjects and we try to give voice to their point of view. Something else that we have become increasingly more pro active in is engaging with Afghan women (Rawa). It would have been too easy to follow our strengths. For me it was a radical change as from Latin America to Afghanistan there is a cultural abyss.

lemanja' has also been active in the organization of the Montreal World Women March in year 2000 and it made this through mobilizing groups and creating networks on the Milanese and national territory. An emphasis is put on the term “relation” and “relationship”. This is made by giving voice to Afghan women’s point of view through ICTs. In the following quote, a limit of the networks is identified:

**Int 12 Ext 12**

At an Italian level, everything happened through the website, when the website worked it gathered contacts and then allowed people to meet physically when networks were established and we went to meetings, for instance we followed all the meetings for the World March involving the national meetings. The problem of networks is that often they are networks which are not established enough, if individuals don’t come to the meetings the work is not rooted in the territory, no?

There is a difference between the communicative aspect behind the idea of networks, which delineate a communication flux form a social actor to the other, and the fact that, often, behind the network there is just one person engaging and therefore not of a collectivity involved. As a consequence, the work does not have a counterpart in the people and territory involved.

Networked forms of interaction need to have a background made of real people and possibly a sort of root in the territory. This sets quite clearly the interdependent relation existing between bounded space (the territory) and unbounded space (the network) aiming to network horizontally by negotiating a distant relation (reach) although rooted links with the territory (Milan) are of fundamental importance. Collective action, in fact, is only possible when there is a territorial dimension to start from, made of real people, as opposed to networks that can be
created by singles behind a computer, who enhance a relational dimension of collective identity. Also in the case of lemanja, the set of social practices involve simultaneously a number of individuals and groups whose differences are not just morphological, but also cultural and racial.

The aim of lemanja is to achieve a contamination with other movements, made possible by personal experience and networked communication as is evident in the following quote:

**Int 12 Ext 14**

We truly believe that the path made by feminists in the 1970s is important and we continue this legacy. The times have changed and there are also other experiences of feminism that are not the ones of Italy in the 1970s that we must understand and integrate. For me the impact with South America has been very strong their grassroots work is very solid, almost every woman there was cut out from academic culture and political movement such as we intend them, and their participation is much more in social movements including grassroots feminism. Up until 17 years ago it was not possible to use the term "feminism" with them as many of them had been bombarded with the idea that feminists were bad, prostitutes... they were popular groups with grassroots origins and if they were not feminists than I don’t know what feminism is, as they were both claiming rights and also working on themselves.

lemanja combines grassroots work that has both a bottom up approach (sensibilization of women using the existing health services) and a top down one (recommendations and work towards the creation of missing services). As far as the transnational feminist kind of support that lemanja offers to Rawa:

**Int 12 Ext 15**

Rawa’s kind of feminism is much more advanced and original than ours, they know how important it is to understand the basis of oppressive situations. It’s difficult as the oppression works from inside! They start from school, clandestine alphabetization in rural areas; they start with the perspective of training towards more global political goals.

The recent “assembled” interaction for lemanja involves the project with local women and the project for the March. After having coordinated the Italian mobilization, they started to work with the Afghan feminist movement. In this way, lemanja operates a hybridization of feminist experiences and its choice of privileging Rawa lays in the following reasons:
For us the choice of privileging Rawa lays in the fact that it is a political subject, a feminist subject with a strong secularism and they would like the same from the State. We would like to import these modalities in Italy, let them be known so that they can influence Italy which is not able to have such a subject. The most fascinating thing is that they do not want to own what they do, their strength is to make the others stronger, there is no competition not like in Rome where they aren’t interested in making others stronger...Rawa are never possessive about what they do.

In the above quote, a contrast is set between the radical group of Afghan women who do not appropriate their own actions and fights and they are more interested in making other people stronger. In Italy, instead, collaboration is difficult and resources are, most of the time, appropriated without sharing them. Also for lemanja’ an everyday based perspective is fundamental because there are networks which were created in the past and need to be kept alive through territorially rooted daily practices. Different kinds of spatialities and temporalities are involved here: the temporality of the everyday and the spatiality of the topographical reach. Although the kind of collective action of lemanja’ is only partially oriented to governance practice, its grass-roots kind of activity is nevertheless important to understand the evolution of the politics of feminist spaces, the way they are enacted and the kind of spatialities they originate. lemanja’ in fact embraces the tensions between boundedness and unboundedness of feminist spaces and its activities are situated in an intermediate space which lies between territory and network.

Concluding remarks

This Chapter has provided an overview, based on three case studies, on what role Milanese women’s organizations play in the governance debate and how they reposition themselves in the public sphere. A notion of governance has been developed in order to understand the current institutional shifts which are helpful to define feminist spatial politics in Milan. While the long-term, hierarchical, centralized and “top-down” decision making is gradually giving way to project-oriented public/private networks, governance policies provide an opportunity for
women's collective action to mobilize in a way that has the potential to obviate the lack of political representation in Italian institutional politics.

Recent institutional shifts have seen the emergence of a range of women's organizations, seeking to avoid the contradictions inscribed in the double process of commodification and decommodification of the role of care, traditionally carried out by women in Italian society. Thinking of governance as gendered, means acknowledging that the process of governance takes place in families, workplaces and communities. This notion clashes with a gender neutral, one-size-fits-all model of welfare. Milanese women's organizations, according to the analysis provided above, belong to three different civil society domains: on one hand they carry out governance practices, like IRENE. Despite their mainstream role, as we have seen throughout the thesis, such organizations do not have the status of institutions. On the other hand there are organizations which replace or work with public services, like Proficua. The mushrooming of women's organizations in Milan has to be read as a response to the crisis of the welfare state. In other cases, such as lemanja', women's organizations, civil society-based, collective action is movement based. Each organization mobilizes around single projects through the activation of networks based on everyday relational practices.

The daily networks created by Milanese women's organizations are based on relational practices amongst women that were one of the key concepts of Milanese feminism and, as I have shown above, the interaction modes based on everyday practices is also the depositary of a specifically feminist legacy. The everyday aspect of feminist practices represents a way to actively resist the dualistic thought that, as we have seen in the division of public and private, always implies power hierarchies. The most evident legacy of the everyday on contemporary Milanese feminist spatial practices is the invention of new ways of inhabiting the polis without necessarily claiming a right to its institutions. The kind of conflicts concerning Italian and, in this case, Milanese women's representation and presence in the public sphere are not just based on the appropriation of material resources but they are about identity. They therefore contribute "to shift hegemonic codes" to use Melucci's vocabulary (1996).

Milanese women's organizations' methods of mobilizing open up a new space for women's collective action and practices. Its novelty consists in the fact that women are relatively new on the political scene. Women's organizations' collective action in Milan happens topologically and contributes to define unbounded spatial practices and project-oriented
networks. This has the potential to re-inscribe the role of Milanese women in a way which is innovative in comparison with the acknowledged ways of political representation. Traditional political representation in political parties and parliamentary institutions is not to be dismissed here and the joint work of several women’s organizations in Milan, including IRENE, in this regard confirms its importance. However, what is highlighted here is the specifically feminist alternative offered by women’s organizations collective action in Milan. Spatial politics have changed over time, so have ways of claiming female citizenship which are increasingly articulated through new topological, network based and unbounded spatial practices that are project-oriented and assemble in different ways according to changing relational constellations.

Collective action is also one of the main features according to which women’s organizations in Milan mobilize around specific projects, events and initiatives. This gives place, each time, to variable assemblages which are different according to reach, size and articulation of the project at stake. Both private and public actors such as Europe and other governmental tiers of the Italian state are an active part of this articulation which takes place both on the territory and in the immaterial space of the networks. The dialectic tension between a scalar and horizontal mode of political interaction is, in this Chapter, interpreted relationally. Allen (2009) and Allen and Cochrane’s (forthcoming) proposed reading of relations of proximity and distance, described by the idea of topology, is an analytical tool to understand the spatial dimension of Milanese women’s organizations’ collective action.

Another dichotomy which emerges in the Chapter is the one between territory and network. While territory provides the bounded basis for action and is the necessary location for collective mobilization, the “basis” and the place where political action is rooted, networks are the communicative device that makes the mobilization or the assemblage possible. This is evident in different ways in the three case studies: for IRENE, the unboundedness of the political assemblages that it creates are of scalar nature as they involve hierarchically different governmental tiers including the European Union, while its action also consists of horizontal interaction with peer organizations based abroad. For IRENE both the territorial and the topological reach of its action are of fundamental importance. Proficua also has a strong territorial focus as its main activity is about integration of migrants and training of public services on multicultural values in Milan. However, its activity presupposes reach and an attention to values, habits and costume that transcend the specifically Italian everyday life.
Thirdly, lemanja’s activity is clearly focused on reach and the unbounded closeness to movements outside Italy such as the Brazilian movement and the Afghan movement but, as lemanja’s interviewee herself underlines, without a rooted action in the territory it is difficult to recruit the human resources necessary to carry out mobilizations and political projects.

In that respect, Chapter 7 defined everyday life politics as a legacy of feminism and has demonstrated that the contemporary decentralization of state power into more dispersed governance practices has changed the ways in which Milanese women appropriate space collectively. In relation to governance, this Chapter demonstrated that the idea of a topological space is one in which collective action is in turn articulated and disarticulated according to different assemblages of social relations and networks at stake. Topological space is therefore particularly suited to describe the political practices that Milanese women’s organizations enact and their spatial features. Chapter 7 through a spatial analysis of its case studies also demonstrated the relation of interdependence existing between different degrees of boundedness. Collective action of Milanese women’s organizations therefore articulates itself on both the territorial and bounded space of the neighbourhoods and communities in Milan and on the topological reach of unbounded and immaterial networks. Both dimensions are mutually constitutive of feminist spatial practices in contemporary Milan.
Chapter 8. Conclusions

8.1 Thematic threads through the thesis

This work has hopefully achieved the aim of shifting the focus from a merely theoretical perspective on feminist politics in Milan to a spatial analysis of feminist politics. There are three thematic threads that run through the thesis, pulling together in a lateral way (i) the relationship between feminist politics and spatial politics in contemporary Milan (ii) the changing spatial politics of Milanese feminism and how that has impacted on institutional politics, and (iii) the significance of women's collective action in contemporary Milan and how it has shaped a distinctive spatial politics. The contemporary debate on space in geography has been integrated with a gender perspective in urban studies, using the literature on social movements, and in particular the work of Alberto Melucci (1982, 1989, 1991, 1996, 2000), to shed light on past and contemporary dynamics of collective action. Melucci's definition of collective action has been given a feminist and a spatial reading, using an approach that juxtaposes the two traditionally antithetic literatures of organization and social movements under the wider umbrella of civil society.

8.1.1 Feminist politics as spatial politics

This work has demonstrated that Milanese feminists during the 1970s appropriated separatist sites that gave them a visibility in the city and this marked their collective access to the public sphere. As we have seen throughout the thesis, the politics of the Milanese feminist movement were strictly intertwined with spatial practices such as separatism. The exclusive women-only appropriation of city spaces had a double function: internally, it aimed at a definition of their political subjectivity to be discussed in isolation from men to overcome their oppression and
previous segregation in the private sphere. This separation also had a strong anti-institutional connotation and, in fact, radical feminists were firmly separatists as opposed to double militancy feminists who chose to struggle in mixed contexts to challenge institutions (and were nonetheless anti-institutional but more flexible on separatist issues). Externally, separatist practices had the function of setting political boundaries in the attempt to appropriate, at the very least, the domains which were more strictly connected to women's issues such as reproductive health, family related issues and violence against women. Separatist practices also represent an attempt to collectively enter a terrain, the one of politics, that feminists felt estranged from.

The sites that feminists appropriated in Milan have been read, in this thesis, as territorially embedded as they were located within urban areas of the city, such as peripheral neighbourhoods or central parts of Milan. The official meeting sites for feminist groups, which I have listed in Chapter 2 and mapped in Chapter 6, were largely complemented by the practice of meeting in private houses made available by activists and this created a territorially active network of contacts, debates, conferences, meetings, and moments of theory building. The rootedness of the newly appropriated sites also allowed feminists to experiment with space by challenging the strict dichotomy between private and public, making private spaces, such as their own homes, public and making common spaces, such as squatted houses, private when trying out collective living.

The theme of private and public is crucial for the feminist urban discourse and, in this work, I have chosen to address it through the metaphor of the shift from atopia to topia. In Chapter 6 atopia is a symbol of a lack of space, to be understood as a lack of exposure in the public sphere (as described in Chapter 5), and represents the hidden, politically insignificant domestic sphere. It is an apolitical space from which the presence of women in the city is regulated and strongly biased (Wilson 1990). The progressive access to city space contributed to the definition of political boundaries outside the private sphere. The collective access of women to the public sphere happened in a separatist way while the individual access of women in the public sphere, from the 1980s onwards, happened in a way that, in a few fortunate cases, contributed to influence mixed social milieus with competences that Milanese women had learnt during their 1970s feminist militancy. This phase represents what I have called a "diffused form of feminism" throughout the thesis.
The thesis has also shown that relational practices which are distinctive to women's spatial politics have configured Milanese women's political space as unbounded. As I have shown in Chapter 5, the practice of autocoscienza represented the starting point for a definition of feminist political subjectivity and its separatist aspect confirms that feminist practices still need "protected" spaces of political elaboration. From the interviews it also became evident that forms of separatism have changed over time, in that they reflect a less inclusive and more unbounded form of space. This is evident from the experience of the younger part of the Milanese feminist movement which does not identify solely with dogmatic feminist ideas. Rather, younger (the so-called "third wave") Milanese feminists belong at the same time to many groups whose criteria of accessibility have became less inclusive when compared to those of the 1970s, and their political practices reflect an increasingly unbounded and network-like idea of space.

8.1.2 Changing spaces, changing institutional practices

Following the themes in the way they are set up in the thesis means recognizing that there is symmetry between anti-institutional and bounded spaces, on the one hand, and non-institutional and unbounded spaces, on the other hand. This symmetry, like the one of the 1970s/bounded spaces and the contemporary/unbounded spaces, can be thought of as an entry point to analyze the framework that this work has developed. The binary 1970s/bounded/anti-institutional and contemporary/unbounded/non-institutional is merely analytical. This is because there is a clear causal link between the boundedness of the spaces and the way they were appropriated both in the 1970s and also today. As recalled when using a Lefevrian framework in Chapter 6, space appropriation is configured as a social and political act. Therefore this work sets up a causal link between space appropriation and the institutional status of feminist spaces, where, in the 1970s, space appropriation was an anti-institutional statement, while in the contemporary reality of civil society-based space appropriation, networks are configured as more open spaces, unbounded, able to sidestep the institutional by creating innovative ways of mobilizing collectively.
From an institutional perspective, feminist spatial politics in Milan were initiated in a social context, the one of the 1968 Italian movement, which was per se already anti-institutional. Feminist trajectories intersected the context of upheaval by advancing different identity issues based on sexual belonging rather than class (the race issue was absent from the Italian debate at the time) and, as I have shown in the thesis, the anti-institutional politics of Milanese feminism enabled me to define the urban sites appropriated by feminists as “counter publics” according to Nancy Fraser (1990). Some elements of oppositional politics have persisted overtime and this is evident in the fact that, although radical and Marxist feminist groups in Milan have been quite flexible in interacting with institutional constituencies, the question of institutional positioning pro or against “pink quotas” in political parties and in Parliament still divides Italian feminists.

On the one hand, institutional space has changed over the last 40 years and has increasingly integrated some of the issues of feminist struggles (abortion, divorce, reforms in family law); it has created *consultori familiari* and has taken up some of the feminist practices such as, for instance, separatism within government institutions, with the acknowledgment of gender differences in the political agenda as a result of both bottom up (from social movements to state politics) and top-down (from Europe to national state politics) institutional regulations (Vacchelli 2008). This is also exemplified by the existence of Equal Opportunity Commissions in the Italian Parliament and by past experiences at a local level such as CADM (Chapter 3). This position reflects the equal opportunity oriented struggles of many organized groups in contemporary Milan who are battling for the so-called “pink quotas” to ensure that at least 1/3 of women participating in political parties are represented in electoral lists during polls and in Parliament. Equal opportunity policies represent a pro-institutional position aimed at increasing the presence of women in decision-making, which has as a clear aim the challenge of a largely male dominated status quo.

On the other hand, the majority of contemporary women’s groups and organizations in Milan are civil society actors who connect with different institutional tiers, although they are not institutions themselves. Throughout the thesis I have defined women’s centres and

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81 The paradox of “women in institutions” in Italy is reflected in the ironic fact that the actual Minister of Equal Opportunity of the Berlusconi government is also a stripper and that the electoral list that The Polo delle Liberta’ (Berlusconi’s Party) at the time of writing (May 2009) proposes in its electoral lists a fair amount of women who are exposing their bodies and sexual attributes over their ideas.
organizations as extra-institutional, or non-institutional, actors. This does not mean that they still oppose institutional politics in the same way that they used to during the 1970s, but that they chose a space which is situated outside institutional political power to pursue their aims. The ways in which institutional space has changed over the last 40 years directly affects Milanese women’s spatial practices and also involves the progressive shift in urban governance inaugurating less centralized processes of decision-making which have, in turn, created new spaces for civil society-based forms of collective action.

Both in the 1970s and today the Milanese women’s movement has attempted to reclaim the polis and this process has emerged through the appropriation of spaces from a politically disempowered position. The access to the agora’, the ancient Greece centre of the polis, reflects a metropolitan spatialization of the ways in which the urban has been reframed. Contemporary appropriation of urban publics happens outside the agora’ of institutional politics and this represents a retreat from the traditional forms of “the political” (Swingedouw 2009). As Eric Swingedouw recently stated, “people’s empowerment can only be realized spatially and geographically and the city represents a privileged space”. If it is true that every revolution is an urban revolution, the place where the contradictions of power come together, and where political practices have to be re-invented, Milanese women’s organizations have been successful in this reinvention of a new agora’ and do propose modes and extra-political practices by mobilizing resources and actors operating outside the state system as I have shown in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 7. This is what, in this work, has been described as appropriation of the non-institutional, the unbounded, and represents a potential for a reconfiguration of the political towards new territories.
8.1.3 Collective action and women's spatial practices

The thesis has argued that a more horizontal way of political interaction, as opposed to the hierarchies within institutional politics, is a legacy of a typically feminist practice based in the everyday and has a genealogy of women interacting horizontally in the everyday of their domestic lives. This everyday experience has been elaborated and transformed into political practice by feminism in the 1970s when Italian women, for a combined number of economic and political reasons, become more integrated in Italian society as I have shown in Chapter 3. The everyday practices of women's interaction have spatial implications as they configure political space as horizontal as opposed to vertical and hierarchic. In a similar way to the everyday, the practice of relationality among women which was born within the theory of differenza sessuale has greatly influenced political practices involving a separatist use of space.

Everyday based and horizontal governance practices of women's organizations in Milan show, in my thesis, how a non-institutional domain such as civil society collective action can work as a replacement for either missing or gender blind social services. Women's organizations assume the role of governance agents in the implementation of EU funding or can trigger an extra-institutional collective action. In Chapter 7, I have shown that women's organizations such as IRENE, Proficua and lemanja' contribute to the process of re-spatializing contemporary political practices in Milan. To do so, I have used the idea of topological space to describe the networked kind of activities involved, which reach Milan's area and beyond, and involve forms of participatory (meaning more spontaneous and less regulated) democracy. A spatial framework which is topological, and which allows for different and project specific assemblages, represents the geographical background of contemporary Milanese women's organizations' extra-institutional collective action.

Mobilization of resources and actors operating outside the state system, horizontal interaction among equal participants and an exchange between independent but interdependent actors are all features of women's organization mobilization in Milan. Collective action of feminist groups in 1970s consisted of the first joint access to the public sphere by women as a newly constituted collective actor. This organized action represented the basis for
a genealogy of spatial politics where these intersect feminist politics. In this work, the relationship between the changing practices of Milanese feminism and its spatial politics represent the key perspective to show how space in turn has contributed towards the specificity of Milanese feminism. Modes of collective action have changed over time as have the spatial politics of the women's movement in Milan: from anti-state and separatist mobilization strategies in the 1970s, to a contemporary mobilization of civil society actors. This thematic thread has shown that it is possible to speak about collective action for women's organizations in Milan and this has specific features according to a women-specific genealogy of collective mobilization creating a relational space which is horizontal, unbounded and topological, based in the everyday.

8.2 Future perspectives

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis has been to bring contemporary geographical debates into feminist theory and to provide new perspectives and ways to interpret feminist spatial practices. In my analysis, women's collective action in Milan proposes a necessary re-configuration of the political towards other territories, where the articulation of active citizenship produces new assemblages within emergent and original orders of social relations (ranging from governance to social movements, collective action, social services and political practices that involve the use of space). As a way to reclaim the polis, the increasingly urgent demands for restructuring social space are met through genuine urban politics enacted by women's organizations in Milan, consisting of inhabiting hybrid spaces situated between the level of traditional political power - as it has been conceived of so far - and everyday life. The relational aspect of space, that includes both its bounded and unbounded features, produces a hybrid space open to changing power relations. As we have seen, boundedness and unboundedness do not contrast with each other (and with networked kind of activities in and beyond Milan's material geography) and they are, rather, interdependent. The new boundaries set by women's collective action serve to de-territorialize and re-territorialize Milan's urban space in a way that
aims to discard pre-existing forms of political action and launch political practices that involve a renewed use of space.

The new form of citizenship proposed by women's organizations' collective action in Milan assumes a model of active citizenship which is the result of a genealogy of feminist thought and projects, made of spatial politics and practices, which refuses traditional politics as an emancipatory target. They inaugurate, for this reason, a challenge to existing power structures, articulating a collective action based on “difference” which no longer assumes “identity” as a point of reference for political struggle. The project-specific forms of mobilization outside traditional institutions represent an attempt in this direction which does not try to undermine other struggles for an increased and qualitative presence of women into politics, but courageously attempts to re-territorialize the sphere of politics proposing an alternative, based on collective action, along unexplored paths. Re-territorialization implies that the new polis is able to incorporate divisions between public and private, which are hybrid and no longer dichotomized; that it can learn and it can learn to be influenced by modes of political action originated within the women's movement, where a multiplicity of differently embodied subjects make of the polis, and its material geographies, the actual location for a more equally redistributed power.
Appendix I: Interview Questions

Section I. Origin of the centre/organization:

- When was your centre born? Why, which specific needs was it meant to meet?
- Where was it started? In which kind of space? Which were the criteria to choose that particular space rather than another one? How did you initially support your centre, materially?
- What was the use of the newly appropriated space?
- Would the space represent an experimental space, alternative to the patriarchal and/or mononuclear family? In which ways?

Section II. Contemporary aspects:

- Is today’s location the same? If not, why has it changed?
- What is the administrative status of your organization? Where do you get your finances from?
- On which basis is the organization accessible? Whose interests does it represent? Which specific needs does your organization address? How are these needs met? What kind of policies does your organization implement, if any? Specifically how does it happen?
- Is there any kind of collective action which your organization pursues in order to implement the policies you aim for? If any, where are the associations you are networking with based? Are the networks local? National? Does you organization have links abroad?
- Do you feel your organization plays an active role within the civil society? In what ways?
- About the women using or benefiting of your organization: do you think their identity has changed over the last decades? If so, how has it changed? How has your organization adapted to these changes?
## Appendix II: Interview List


<table>
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<th>Interviewee(s)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>12/06/2006</td>
<td>ABC (Bicocca)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14/06/2006</td>
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<td>14/06/2006</td>
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<td>15/06/2006</td>
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<td>Libera Università delle donne</td>
<td>Anita Sonego</td>
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<td>23/11/2006</td>
<td>Cicip&amp;Ciciap</td>
<td>Nadia Riva</td>
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<td>23/11/2006</td>
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<td>24/11/2006</td>
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<td>Giuliana Baldi</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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### Milan 25/03/2007-15/04/2007

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<td>29/03/2007</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>14/04/2007</td>
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