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A Legacy Without a Will.
Feminist Organising as a Transformative Practice

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To Ester & Livio

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- Equi Pierazzini, M., Monti, A., and Dubini, P. (2017). *Glass Cliff In Art? An Exploratory Study Of Women Artists' Careers At Art Basel System*. Paper published in the proceeding of the European Academy of Management, June 21-24, Glasgow, UK. ISSN 2466-7498
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- Bertelli, L., Equi Pierazzini, M. (2017) « *Le thème est l'authenticité* ». *Une analyse de Carla Lonzi à travers le processus d'écriture de Vai pure. Dialogo con Pietro Consagra*. «L'homme et la société» 203-204: 203-232. ISSN 0018-4306

PRESENTATIONS

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- Bertelli, L.; Equi Pierazzini, M. (2017) “*Il tema è l'autenticità*”. *Figura di due coscienze che rimarranno due: il processo di scrittura di Vai pure*. conference “Non può essere perduta questa parola. Carla Lonzi scrittrice” (February, 10-11, 2017), Società Italiana delle Letterate and Associazione Evelina De Magistris, Livorno.
- Equi Pierazzini, M., Monti, A., and Dubini, P. (2017) *Glass cliff in art? An exploratory study of women artists' careers at Art Basel system*. 2017 European Academy of Management Conference (Best Paper Nominee – Management and governance of culture, heritage and tourism Track), (June 21-24, 2017), Glasgow, UK.

Abstract

Grounded on a practice-based, processual, performative and material understanding of organising (Corradi et al. 2008; Feldman 2002; Czarniawska 2014; Lindberg and Walters 2013), the dissertation explores an example of feminist organising (Acker 1995, Brown 1992). The study investigates upon the concrete interweaving of theories and practices in the everyday organising and shows how a specific way of organising outside traditional institutions can be in itself a crucial way to shield, enact and therefore transmit a particular heritage. The research looked at the relation between theories and practices as key perspective to understand the work underlying both the creation and maintenance of an organisation. The study, that focuses on the first feminist bookstore in Italy, the Milan Women's Bookstore, founded in the second half of the Seventies, was carried out combining fieldwork with archival research covering more than thirty years of organisational life; in fact, this research reconstructs the history, context of reference and theories produced by the Bookstore while also observing and participating in the unfolding of its day-to-day activities. The dissertation thus mixes practice-based (Nicolini 2012; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016) and historical perspectives (Wadhwani et al. 2018; Clark and Rowlinson 2004; Üsdiken and Kieser 2004) in studying organising.

Overall, the text that takes shape consists in a contextualised narration of the becoming of an organisation in an environment characterised by intense philosophical and political debates and suggests three key elements in feminist organising, space, relations and language, as sites where ideas inscribe in the organising sphere (Joerges and Czarniawska 1998 Czarniawska 2014a) and where processes of symbolic institutional maintenance take place (Zilber 2006). The way in which theories and practices interact one another is qualified as material reflexivity. The expression indicates the collective reflexive process through which participants appraise spatial, relational and discursive practices in creating the organisation and functions also as a device able to institutionalise feminist meanings.

PART I

Introduction to the study: theoretical and methodological horizon

Part I introduces this dissertation study and its context.

Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting the concept of feminist organising, which synthetically evokes the theoretical foundation of the research both in term of ways of appraising the nature of feminism and the orientation in studying and writing about organisations and by stressing the importance of feminist organisations in processes of heritage transmission in Italian Feminism.

By laying the theoretical foundations on which this thesis is grounded, and presenting the context of the study and its main characteristics, Chapter 2 sets the stage for the formulation of the research questions.

Drawing both from organisation and feminist theory Chapter 3 articulates the epistemological orientation of the study, offers a reflexive positioning of who is writing and describes the methodology adopted in the stages of the research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study examines the processual and recursive work that an organisation, embedded in a specific socio-cultural context, engages with in order to become what it is and, in parallel, inquires into the relationship between theories and practices in the dimension of organising. In order to do so, the research focuses on feminist organising because it offers a unique context of observation. First, as a historical phenomenon, theoretical orientation, political practice and movement at one and the same time, focusing on organising efforts connected to feminism allows us to consider the way in which political and philosophical dimensions influence work practices. Moreover, feminism constitutes a crucial point of observation for exploring a theory that is also a practice, a standpoint which thus offers significant insights into the way actors themselves engage reflexively in sets of doings and sayings. There is no such thing as feminist theory without feminist subjects, political stakes and practices. This point constitutes one of the key elements of a tradition that is composite and diverse in its political objective, strategies and philosophical underpinnings, as Judith Butler has pointed out:

Feminist theory is never fully distinct from feminism as social movement. Feminist theory would have no content where there is no movement, and the movement, in its various directions and forms, has always been involved in the act of theory. Theory is an activity that does not remain restricted to the academy. It takes place every time a possibility is imagined, a collective self-reflection takes place, a dispute over values, priorities, and language emerges. (Butler 2004: 176)

The relevance of practice in doing and transmitting feminism is captured quite effectively by the expression feminist organising, and I adopt Joan Acker's argument (1995) in using this expression in the

course of the dissertation instead of talking about feminist organisation:¹

In using “organizing”, I intend to emphasize that organizations are continually constituted through practices and processes that occur through the actions of organizational participants. Many of these practices [...] become nonexistent when no one carries them out, when people stop organizing. [...] My emphasis over organizing and agency does not imply a theory based upon an individual actor making lonely – however well informed – decisions, for I take organizing to be a profoundly social activity that arises from and often aims to change the prevailing social relations. Of course, this is what women’s and feminist organizations try to do. (Acker 1995: 137-38)

The above point has three main implications. First, it defines an approach to studying organising that is coherent with the currents of thought in organisation theory that advocate for a practice-based, processual, performative and material understanding of organising (Nicolini 2012; Corradi et al. 2008; Feldman 2000; Czarniawska 2014a; Lindberg and Walter 2013; Czarniawska 2004b), the theoretical framework on which this dissertation is grounded.² Secondly, by avoiding to define *ex ante* what a feminist organisation is, we have a better chance to overcoming the risk of attaching fixed ideological and structural qualities to the project. In fact, organising under feminist world views can take many different forms according to contextual factors and the ideational aspect of the project in question. Indeed,

¹ Acker refers to Helen Brown’s use of ‘women organising’, and her distinction between organisations as entities and organising as ongoing activity the scholar made at the conference on feminist organisations from which the book *Feminist Organisations. Harvest of the Women’s Movement* (cf. Ferree and Martin 1995) stemmed from. On this cf. also Helen Brown’s work (Brown 1992).

² Indeed Helen Brown, to whom Joan Acker is referring to (cf. note 1), make several references in her work to Weick (1969). Therefore, it can be said that the streams of thought in feminist organisations and in organisation theory from which I am drawing both refer to a common source.

seeing as “No one stands in the perspective that might afford a global view of feminism. No one stands within a definition of feminism that would remain uncontested” (Butler 2004: 176) and using a singular voice to categorise a vast and complex movement represents a risky exercise (Cavarero 2002b: 78), organising practice inspired by feminisms could potentially take many different forms. Thirdly, as argued by Helen Brown (1992), on which Acker reasoning is grounded upon (cf.note 1), shifting perspective from organisation to organising is particularly apt for looking at feminist aggregations, as looking closely at actions and processes, at “the *how* of organizing” (Brown 1992: 5) allows to devote attention at the connection, negotiated in practice and situated in socio-historical contexts, between values and social action, of which organising choices are a relevant part. Such a connection is not a direct and unidirectional one, but is negotiated, as values are symbolic referents for actions, impacting their reading and perceived legitimacy. The nature of the influence and the concrete work done to materialise this relation, is a central concern of this dissertation, specifically interested in the connection between theories and organising practices. Finally, the term organising stresses the fact that practices cease to exist without forms of agency busy performing them. This is a particularly relevant point in relation to feminism, understood, as this study argues, as a (methodological) practice. As a practice – and a political and transformative one – feminism entertains a particularly complex relationship with the transmission of its knowledge and heritage: it can be learnt and transmitted through relational exchanges, in embodied contexts and via practice. Feminist organising therefore appears to constitute a significant site in which feminism is produced and reproduced in a relational, public setting.

The central role feminist spaces play in spreading and transmitting feminist knowledge is particularly crucial in the Italian context, the focus of this study. Feminist organisations of Neo-Feminism (Bracke 2014a; Di Cori 2012) in Italy were historically formed in keeping with the principle of ‘separatism’ (Giachetti 2005; Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Bracke 2014a; Restaino 2002b), and were thus characterised by a contested relationship with institutions (De Lauretis 1990: 6; Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Bracke 2014a; Sapegno 2011).

Multiple forms of organising started to blossom from the second half of the Seventies onward (a similar process was also unfolding in other countries, cf. Springer 2005; Hogan 2016), including feminist bookstores, libraries, documentation centres, publishing houses, artists' collectives, etc. These forms can be understood as spaces in which participants were able to experiment with new forms of aggregation, political elaboration, and research and knowledge-generation (Murphy 2018; Bono and Kemp 1991). Therefore, this context enables investigation not only of the way theories have influenced organising practices, but also of the places in which feminist knowledge and practices are formulated, constituted and maintained.

1.1 The focus of the study

The study focuses on the Milan Women's Bookstore, Italy's first feminist bookstore founded in 1975. As an organisation born out of the fervent theoretical activity of the Seventies – both a context influencing the organisation and a product of its activity, as the *Libreria* is considered to be the cradle of many important theories and texts – that is still open today, the Bookstore represents a key space for analysing the intertwinement of theories and practices in the sphere of organising. Specifically, this organisation allowed me to consider both the historical and ideational aspects associated with the emergence and maintenance of this form of organising, appraising them both historically and in practice. In fact, this research reconstructs the history, context of reference and theories produced by the Bookstore while also observing and participating in the unfolding of its day-to-day activities. The study allowed me to observe simultaneously how this specific organisation functioned as a way of maintaining and transmitting feminism, and how organising practices are shaped concretely in relation to the ideational aspects of feminism itself.

This was achieved through a combination of a one-year-long field study and an investigation of the history of the bookstore, conducted by examining archival documents covering thirty years of organisational life. Few studies, according to Zilber (2008: 165-66), have

looked at the works of meaning bridging the material and discursive dimensions, and even fewer consider not only already completed institutional processes but also the “in vivo and in situ” unfolding of these processes. This study has sought to overcome this limitation by bringing together practice-based (Nicolini 2011; Nicolini 2012; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016) and historical perspectives (Wadhwani et al. 2018; Clark and Rowlinson 2004; Üsdiken and Kieser 2004), and by highlighting the discursive and narrative dimension (Zilber 2008; Zilber 2009; Czarniawska 1997; Czarniawska 1999) of organising.

The fabric of the written text of this dissertation is a trace of a ‘non-estrangement’ (Lonzi 2010a [1969]) of the writing subject in relation to the organisation and represents a trace of the feminist research methodology that is mobilised throughout the text. In keeping with this premise, and seeing as “importing texts from other fields tends to be a good way to say ‘new’ things” (Mol 2002: 22), this study seeks to bring different fields into dialogue and to break the boundaries between the object of study and its methodology. For example, its methodology ‘activated’ Italian feminist theory, thereby breaking the boundaries delimiting this theory as the object of the field study. This also functioned as a change of lens, oftentimes serving to spark new conversations (Maclean et al. 2016) by virtue of focusing specifically on *Libreria* organising, thus changing the perspective on a case that has traditionally been regarded from a theoretical and political point of view.

The result is an exploration of feminist organising, of the material and discursive work of interweaving between theories and practices in the organising sphere, and a reflection on organising as a way to shield, enact, and therefore transmit a particular heritage.³

³ The first sentence of thesis title is meant to capture and express this dissertation interest in processes of heritage transmission. In fact, the first sentence constituting it, “A legacy without a will” is a reference to an expression by French poet René Char (“Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament”, in Char, R. (1968) [1946]: 48) quoted by Hannah Arendt (translated as “Our inheritance was left to us by no testament”) in the preface to *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Arendt, 2006 [1961]:3). The expression, used by Arendt as an image to talk about the role and influence

1.2 The structure of the thesis

This dissertation is structured as follows. It is comprised of eleven chapters, grouped into four main parts. Part I, of which this chapter belongs, introduces the study, literature and methods. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical foundations of the study, introducing its setting and main research questions. The chapter then presents the analytical concepts employed in trying to make sense of these questions. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, presents its research and writing phases and outlines its overall organisation. In narrating the approach of the study, the chapter also positions the role of feminism in this text. Part II contextualises the emergence of the chosen case study. Chapter 4 offers the reader a synthetic history of the emergence of the Italian feminist movement in the Seventies and presents some key issues in its development. The chapter also describes ‘consciousness raising’, a key feminist practice that can also be considered the first example of feminist organising. After an introductory, analytical section framing the concept of *practice* in feminism, Chapter 5 presents the ‘practice of doing’, an expression developed in the second half of the Seventies by the Italian Feminist Movement and indicating a feminist practice devoted to organising; in this case, the concept is outlined through a historical reconstruction of the phases leading to its formalisation. Amidst the widespread energy funnelled into creating feminist organisations in the second half of the Seventies, the Milan Women’s Bookstore was born. Chapter 6 goes through key archival documents to narrate the early phases of Bookstore life, from the idea

of Tradition in the present of political action, has in turn been “appropriated” by another text, to which I am referring to, that employs it as its title. The collection of essay, “Un’eredità senza Testamento” (the Italian translation of the phrase “a legacy without a will”), is a volume whose intent was to reflect on the status feminism today and on its relation with younger generations (cf. Padoan et al. 2001). Another text referring to Char in the context of feminism and women study is a 1986 essay by historian Anna Rossi Doria (*Il tempo delle donne*, collected in Rossi-Doria, A. (2007a): 291:299).

generation phases to its opening in 1975. While chapter 5 and 6 analyses are based on archival research and documents, Part III is devoted to the fieldstudy. Chapter 7 consists in an analysis of the key publications and editorial production of the Bookstore with the aim of introducing the reader to the key theorisation produced or connected to Bookstore intellectual life and, in so doing, offering a reading of the unfolding of its political thought. Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the Milan Women's Bookstore organising. While chapter 8 synthetically presents significant Bookstore activities and practices and focuses on members' narration of it, chapter 9 follows two key change-bearing events that took place in 2001, shedding light on the way new practices have been constructed in relation to old ones, and why. Part IV is composed by chapter 10, that discusses the overall meaning of the dissertation and states its main contributions, and by Chapter 11 that outlines the study's conclusions.

Chapter 2

Literature review and theoretical framework

In this chapter I present the theoretical framework of this study devoted to feminist organising. I am interested in the processual and recursive work that an organisation, embedded in a specific socio-cultural context, engages with in its foundational phase, and, in parallel, in inquiring into the relationship between theories and practices in the dimension of organising. The epistemological framework and analytical tools around which I have organised my study were chosen after a first round of analysing the field material, conducted following grounded theory orientation (cf. chap. 3), in order to avoid imposing any given set of theories or methodologies on the study before engaging in it. Using a theoretical framework to make sense of a phenomenon is far from a neutral operation – theories and methods are not only interrelated, they also they have a history and context that inform their assumptions. This appeared particularly clearly *vis-à-vis* a case such as *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano that was not only already part of an intellectual tradition with its own theories, critical stances, and methodological orientations – namely feminism – but was also actively engaged in constituting this tradition. The focus of this study, in fact, represents the first example of a feminist bookstore in Italy, also recognised as a subject developing and proposing a specific theoretical orientation within feminist philosophy: Italian feminism of difference. In order to understand the relationship between theories, practices and organising at the *Libreria*, it was important for me to engage with the history and broader social and intellectual *milieu* of the *Libreria*. Thus, as a conscious methodological operation, I spent the first year of doctoral research studying the main theoretical tenets and methodological orientations of feminist theory. I have also reviewed organisational field studies dealing with feminist

organisations (i.e. Zilber 2002 whose empirical work is considered “exemplary” by Lawrence et al. 2009: 24). All this work constituted a fundamental compass for my research and has oriented me in understanding in what area of organisation and management studies I could most fruitfully position my research.

The chapter is thus structured as follows: in section 2.1 I present some key issues in practice theory (Nicolini 2012), an orientation which, together with the concept of organising and ‘action nets’ (Czarniawska 2004b), constitutes the epistemic premises of my way of looking at organising. Section 2.2 presents the setting of the study and introduces my main research questions. Section 2.3 introduces the analytical concepts that I put to use in order to deal with such questions: being particularly interested in the relationship between feminism and its materialisation in organising, I have presented some ideas about ideational elements in the emergence of an organising practice (2.3.1), and the concept of ‘translation’ as a practice-based explanation of the processual and performative unfolding of such work (2.3.2) that can happen only when contextually and materially bound (2.3.3).

2.1 Some key elements of practice theory in organisation studies

Practice theory has become increasingly influential in Organisation Studies (Poggio 2006; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016), an interest that can be contextualised as part of the advent of the so-called ‘practice turn’ in contemporary social theory (Schatzki 2001a).¹ It has moreover been

¹ I use the expression “so-called” because, as Barbara Czarniawska has pointed out (Czarniawska 2014a; 2015), the “hybrid field” of Management and Organisation Studies is already supposedly engaged in the study and description of organising and managerial practices.

argued that this interest in practice as a dimension of the analysis of work and organisation has its own history within the discipline itself that actively contributed to the “practice turn”, particularly through empirical studies. Examples are the studies conducted on communities of practice, the strategy-as-practice stream of research, organisational learning and knowledge management (Corradi et al. 2008; 2010; Miettinen et al. 2009). Practices can be defined as

regimes of a mediated object-oriented performance of organised set of sayings and doings. We call these performances ‘practices’ when they have a history, social constituency and hence, a perceivable normative dimension. [...] historically situated performance and the resources that go into producing and accounting for them is the basic building block of a practice-based approach. (Nicolini 2017: 21)

From this definition, it follows that practices are bodily performances carried out thanks to material and discursive resources that exists as long as they are reproduced by a group or web of relations which performs and legitimises them. Practices have a history and specific social group of reference, and thus they have the potential to acquire a normative dimension.

Distinguishing between weak and strong approaches within the wider ‘practice turn’ can be helpful in better qualifying it (Nicolini 2012; 2017). The first consists in reporting actions and activities put in place by actors in organisations, the activities of practitioners. These orientations have also been defined as *common-sense theories of practice* (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016) or approaches that regard *practices as objects* (Corradi et al. 2010). By contrast, a strong approach, although equally interested in the daily and mundane actions of organisational life, “strives to explain social matters, their emergence, change, disappearance and effects in terms of practices instead of simply registering what practices are performed” (Nicolini 2017: 23). This

approach advocates for a grounded and reflexive generation of knowledge “rather than de-theorizing our research for the sake of capturing the mythical purity of practice” (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016: 188). To state it differently, a strong approach to practice consists in a *way of seeing* a context, as Corradi et al. 2010 put it: “many scholars adopt the sight metaphor as a lens for understanding the situatedness of practical reasoning and the contingent nature of organizational rationality”. Corradi et al. 2010 argue that these two approaches (what they define “practice as object” and “practice as epistemology”) cannot go together as they represent not only two different research orientations but also, and more relevantly, two different positionings within the field of Organisation Studies, with only the second having the potential to develop a critical function.

In fact, the epistemological orientation of a strong practice-focused approach stems from a diverse and broad range of intellectual traditions² entailing a conceptualisation of the primacy of practice,

² Given the diverse theoretical roots behind the ‘practice turn’, the expression *practice theory* itself is misleading (Nicolini 2012; 2017:24) as there is no such thing as a unified theory of practice (Schatzki 2001a: 2). I specify how these synthetic points refer to the appraisal of the practice tradition in Organisation Studies. The theoretical underpinning behind it derives from philosophical traditions that I have decided not to engage with, as I wish to avoid any superficial explanation. A discarded feature in the development of Western thought since the Neoplatonic reception of Plato’s and Aristotle’s views on *praxis* (Nicolini 2012), the concept of ‘practice’ and ‘practice orientation’ returned to the core of social science tradition from the Seventies onwards with work by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Antony Giddens, the most extensively cited authors in the genealogical reconstruction of a modern praxeology influencing Organisation Studies (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016; Nicolini 2012). Besides these key figures, other authors widely indicated as foundational for a practice orientation are Wittgenstein and Heidegger. These thinkers, together with Marxist and American pragmatist traditions, paved the way for “practice to be rescued from its historical demotion and return powerfully to the center of discussion” (Nicolini 2012: 41). Wittgenstein and

understood as a “set of doing and saying” (Schatzki 2001a: 48); as such, it is engaged in criticising both the Cartesian dualism of philosophical debate and the opposition between structure and agency found in sociological traditions (Corradi et al. 2010). In keeping with these foundations, this view attempts to overcome rationalist and reductionist explanations of actions as carried out by independent rational actors (*homo economicus* and ‘rational actor’ model, cf. Simon 1957), as well as the deterministic and rule-bounded models of *homo sociologicus*. Scientific rationality and its influence in Organisation Studies are also called into question as part of an effort to overcome its core assumption about what is knowledge – representational knowledge generated by an epistemological relationship between an independent subject and a knowable object (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016). This perspective thus “represents, in its essence, a powerful device with which to re-discuss the positivist and rationalist paradigms, which are still active in various fields of organisational studies” (Corradi et al. 2010: 278).

Here I take a strong approach to practice, an approach which is interesting to my research precisely for its critical stance. Such an orientation

denotes a family of orientations that take orderly materially mediated doing and sayings (‘practices’) and their aggregations as central for the understanding of organisational and social phenomena. [...] Practice approaches are a primary way to study

Heidegger are evoked, oftentimes without proper engagement with their thought as Reckwitz (2002) points out, essentially because they are seen as proponent of philosophical orientations that, in contrast to the Cartesian subject-object dualism, proposed the primacy of practice as a concept for navigating the social sphere in which there is no ontological difference between actor and external world (Miettinen et al. 2009), a perspective in which “as actors, we are ‘always already’ inter- connected with other actors and the world. We always take part in and perform social practices” (Buch 2015: 116).

organisation processually. This is because all coherent practice approaches subscribe to the view that social and organisational life stem from and transpire through the real-time accomplishments of ordinary activities. (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017: 2)

A research process informed by practice theory therefore entails the study of phenomena conceptualised as at once social, discursive and material, and thus looking at organisations accordingly, as bundles of these elements. In keeping with this perspective, this understanding that our being in reality is always mediated by activities which are social and corporeal (Corradi et al. 2010), in empirical work the analysis of both objects and actors as producers and re-producers of practices is prioritised (Sandberg e Tsoukas 2016). Moreover, this idea of practice implies an understanding of practical knowledge as embedded – both carried out by actors and in the social historical context where it is produced – and inscribed in objects that are not necessarily explicit or verbal (Miettinen et al. 2009), conceived as a form of mastery, of ways of saying, acting, and using (Reckwitz 2002). Such an embodied view of knowledge is quite consonant with feminist theory, as Schatzki himself mentioned (Schatzki 2001a: 2). Besides its epistemological contributions, feminism is mobilised also for its important addition to the analyses of gender performativity and in those studies that deal with the conceptualisation, analysis and unravelling of gender as a social practice in organisational settings (cf. for example Gheradi and Poggio 2001; Poggio 2006). However there is room (to my knowledge) for a more explicit and systematic consideration and citation of feminism in the genealogical reconstructions of the intellectual traditions influencing a theory of practice (cf. on this note 2). This dissertation for example will show the centrality of the concept of practice and its theorisation in Italian feminism (cf. especially chapter 5).

To conclude, a practice theory perspective entails studying organisation in a processual and multi-layered way. As repeated and shared practices are seen as constituent of social life (Nicolini 2012), social

phenomena are examined as simultaneous rather than artificially divided into levels, thus overcoming the approach to social phenomena analysed in terms of different layers (comprising *micro* as what people do and say, *meso* as routines, and *macro* as institutions) (Miettinen et al. 2009). Consequently, in this perspective, empirical research has a central place:

While debating what practice is can be a useful exercise to refine our vocabulary and sharpen our analytical categories, this is only a mean to an end. At some point, one has to engage with practice itself and allow the phenomenon to bite back. Beyond this point, the ontological project becomes counterproductive as it stifles the engagement. Practice theory does not mean to theorise an ideal type of practice and then test its distance in the real world. This would, in fact, reinstate the very primacy of propositional knowledge that practice theory wishes to contest. Rather practice theory is an accumulation of choices and differences that makes a difference in both conducting empirical research and writing the results in a text. (Nicolini 2017: 25)

For this reason, I then move on to explaining the application and the use I have made of it. The key motivation for my choice of the practice perspective lies first and foremost in its epistemological orientation, this relatively simple idea, as I understood it, of employing a grounded and reflexive sensibility in approaching organisation. Practice theory seemed to me a sensitivity in Organisation Studies that entails reflexive work, as practice theory is in itself a practice (Nicolini 2017: 25-6) which rejects a supposedly neutral application of theory, positing as it does that the phenomenon in front of us should not be stifled by an already-given set of theories approach. This stance allowed me to give prominence to my empirical case, and from that allow a framework of analysis to emerge. Secondly, the idea of ‘theory-method package’ (Nicolini 2012) finds empirical application in my

study. Throughout my research on *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano, I operationalised not only concepts from Organisation Studies, but also from the perspective of Feminism of Difference, the very perspective that the bookstore helped to create and maintain.

2.2 Studying feminist bookstores: emergence, organising and instituting outside institutions

Libreria delle Donne di Milano emerged in a period, the second half of the Seventies, when second wave feminist organisations started to appear in Europe and the US. As I explain in chapter 4, feminist organisations of Neo-Feminism in Italy stemmed from a process in which groups detached themselves from traditional political formations (for example political parties) and constituted their own entities, at least in the inception phase, following the principle of separatism from society's institutions (Giachetti 2005; Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Bracke 2014a; Restaino 2002b). The politics of the Italian feminist movement in the Seventies, "autonomous, informal and anti-institutional" (Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]: 116) were thus characterised by what has been defined an 'anti-institutional politics' (De Lauretis 1990: 6; Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Bracke 2014a; Sapegno 2011). It is worth clarifying that I use the term *institution* to refer to established and formalised aggregations stemming from traditions other than Feminism, be it political parties or universities, symbol of the production and reproduction of male-dominated knowledge which until that moment had excluded the critical contribution of women. In other words, it was the culture and logics of patriarchy that women engaging in this separatist gesture wanted to avoid. In this sense, 'institution' and 'institutionalisation' can be conceptualised as types of organisations participating in the taken-for-granted social order where certain norms and ideas acquire rule-like status (cf. Greenwood et al. 2008: 4-5).

The contested relationship towards institutions was also evident in a debate that converged with other factors to grant Italian Feminism a relatively marginal position in academic curricula, at least until the late Nineties. On one hand, the structural characteristics (in this case rigidity and in some cases outright hostility) of Italian academia influenced the institutionalisation process of Women's Studies, slowing it down (Magaraggia and Leone 2010, Di Cori, 2013)³; on the other hand, feminists themselves were suspicious of the creation of *ad hoc curricula*, perceiving it as "ghettoisation" (Murphy 2018; Bono and Kemp 1991; Sapegno 2011). In other words, the idea of integrating feminism into the university through programs explicitly tackling 'female issues' was regarded as problematic, in the fear that women's critical thought and transformative practices would be neutralised as it was transformed into institutionalised knowledge⁴. It could be said that feminists feared and resisted institutionalisation as Berger and Luckman (1967) conceptualised it: "ideas and practices are institutionalised when they have achieved the attributes of exteriority and objectivity", and as such have a thing-like status (Greenwood et al. 2008: 5). For a movement entailing a critical view of the social order and theorising personal transformation as a mean of changing society,

³ Magaraggia and Leone (2010) and Di Cori (2013) offer interesting reflections on the history of the institutionalisation of women's studies in Italy shedding light on the structural factors influencing it. The scholars converge in indicating how the 1999 reform of Italian University (Decree 3rd November 1999, n. 509) played a role in opening up universities and paved the way for these types of curricula to be recognised.

⁴ Veronica Pravadelli maintains that critics towards institutions, especially academia, have been a common feature of any second wave feminism in western world (Pravadelli 2010). However, the relation between feminist movement and academy, to be framed within the reflection upon the tension between feminist practices and feminist theories, is still a feature of feminist debates at large (cf. Godard 2006 and Hooks 1994, specifically chapter 5, "Theory as a Liberatory Practice").

the idea of becoming a 'thing' would undoubtedly have been met with resistance.

However, the absence of Women's Studies in the form of formalised educational or research programs such as "degree courses, departments, chairs or lectureships" (Bono and Kemp 1991: 3) did not mean that there were not women in academia teaching, researching and carrying out feminist work; rather, they adopted other strategies to do so, as Bono and Kemp have argued: "instead of trying to institutionalise these issues, however, they manage to carve out a space in the curriculum *as it is*. In this respect they infiltrate and exploit the grey areas of academic organisation" (Bono and Kemp 1991: 3). Feminists were thus working and advocating for continuity between women's places and the university in order to preserve the feminist modality of relational and practical knowledge-generation (Giardini and Pezzuoli 2015).

This perspective can be understood in light of another fundamental element of Italian feminism, an element which, in continuity with the political move of separatism, constituted a specific, autonomous, form of knowledge-generation characterised by the dense and two-way relationship between theories and practices. The process of theorising is understood as necessarily adherent to and in continuity with the practical concerns of women and of the movement, and the political practices of the movement are the concrete signs of feminism as theory (Cavarero 2002b). As philosopher Adriana Cavarero explains:

Italian philosophers of difference operate primarily within the political practices of feminism and speculate on them rather than on the canonical texts of philosophy. The work on the texts is clearly done as it is part of the job as philosophers, but the approach to them is oriented from the problems emerging from the actual contexts where the various practices intertwine: *autocoscienza, disparità, affidamento, relazione, partire da sé*, just to name a few. (Cavarero 2002b: 97)

The centrality of autonomous organisations such as the *Libreria delle Donne* should be evaluated in this context, as they came to represent the physical, social and intellectual space for the movement to develop (Murphy 2018) and for feminist knowledge to be created, disseminated and transmitted (Bono and Kemp 1991), as well as to be preserved. Emerging in the second half of the Seventies, these organisations constituted a sort of mediating space that gave form to the possibility of operating in public space (as opposed to the mainly private sphere of the early phase of the movement, centred on ‘consciousness raising’ practices), while avoiding participation in the institutions of “male centred, mainstream culture” (Bracke 2014a: 190). The spatial dimension is particularly relevant here, as feminist organisations were, and are even today, primarily spaces in which women can meet and discuss face-to-face. This feature underlines the nature of the transmission of feminist heritage and knowledge, namely relational and embodied.

Institution and institutionalisation are thus relevant albeit controversial themes in studying these organisations. Refusing to be co-opted by already-existing institutions and resisting institutionalisation, feminist knowledge found other ways to persist over time, for example by ‘materialising’ in feminist organisations. In this context, characterised by a strong anti-institutional stance and a close relationship between theorising and practical work in which material spaces proved to be important nets of relations, knowledge-generation and transmission, the *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano is a particularly interesting case study. Created in 1975, it is still active today, and still run by part of the founding collective (i.e. it is run by feminists), thus allowing us not only to look at the organisation historically but also to conduct a field study, that is, it represents a site for exploring the happening of an organisation (Schatzki 2006), defined as “a bundle of [...] interrelated practices transpiring amid interconnected material orders” (Schatzki 2006: 1864).

The *Libreria* is not only a feminist bookstore, it is also

recognised as a “point of reference for any political and theoretical debate in the feminist movement” (Bono and Kemp 1991:109), considered a fundamental actor in elaborating and producing a specific theoretical strand of Italian feminism, namely Feminism of Difference, of which it is a symbol (Lussana 2012: 89) and a model for other feminist cultural initiatives (Bracke 2014a: 190-91). Its history and theoretical positions have been the object of studies, therefore, either as a collective entity or by examining the works of individual authors who are part of the *Libreria* collective (cf. Martucci 2008; Fanciullacci 2016, 2017). What I am particularly interested in is looking at the *Libreria delle Donne* as an organisation in its own right, or better, looking at the *Libreria* in terms of its organising dimension. While the definition of organisation cited above by Schatzki (2006) already accounts for a processual and material understanding, the term ‘organising’ stresses more radically the idea that organisations never exist as reified and stable entities; rather, it calls for looking at organising as a contextual and ongoing process (Lindberg and Walter 2013). First introduced by Weick (1969), the term indicates a research interest in ongoing processes rather than structures (Czarniawska 2014a) and can be operationalised using the concept of ‘action net’, a concept which derives from a combination of new institutional perspectives and the ‘sociology of translation’ (Czarniawska 1997) introduced in and for Organisation Studies by Barbara Czarniawska (1997; 2004b). The concept of ‘action net’ allows the researcher to overcome a traditional focus on places, people, properties and issues as objects of analysis (Czarnawska 2004a; 2014a) and instead observe patterns of actions, only subsequently identifying actors, networks, or organisations – as the outcomes rather than the input of organising. The process of organising is thus understood as an ongoing achievement (Feldman 2000: 613) in which an organisation, which might be temporarily stabilised and ‘appear’ (Lindberg and Czaniawska 2006; Czarniawska 2004b), is conceptualised as recursively connected to material elements and enacted. The concept of ‘action net’ allows the researcher to “minimize that which is taken for granted prior to the analysis”

(Czarniawska 2004b: 780). It therefore represents a way of studying organisations, not an analytical tool, and offers a starting point for the study of organisations (Lindberg and Walter 2013; Lindberg and Czarniawska 2006).

In keeping with this perspective, I thought that by studying the specific, contextual feminist organising done by the *Libreria* I could somehow understand how the different elements comprising it were knitted together without giving prominence or a stabilised identity to any of them, in an effort to examine the process of organising the *Libreria* in its emergence. In fact, the *Libreria delle Donne* is actually at least two different things – a feminist space with a political orientation and a bookshop with a commercial nature – but at the same time it is neither of these two things. Rather, it can be conceptualised as an action net engaged in different actions, a minimum of two, the core ones: theorising and selling.

In this framework, I was interested in looking at the *Libreria*, which simultaneously constitutes the trace of a historical event, the figuration of a theoretical perspective, and an organising practice, and trying to understand the practical and historical process through which this feminist bookstore was constituted.

Secondly, in this context, I set out to examine the process which, through the intertwinement of theories and practical work, contributed simultaneously to the process of organising and theoretical creation. The bookstore is engaged in the process of *doing feminism*, a process that entails not only the production of texts and theories but also the repeated embodiment of feminist principles in actions and practices.

In parallel, by looking at the process of organising I was interested in understanding how this organisation maintained and transmitted feminism, and recursively how feminism has played a role in the constitution and maintenance of organisational practices. Given *Libreria's* recognised role in feminist debate, I would like to investigate the process of institutionalising practices within this organisation,

asking how such institutionalisation influenced the maintenance of Feminism of Difference as an institution.

In summary, I asked:

- Why and how did this organisation come to life? What relationships does this process entertain with a broader theoretical and historical dimension?
- What relationship emerged between the theories being produced and the organising practices and processes?
- How is feminist heritage and consciousness preserved and transmitted through this organisation?

2.3 Some selected concepts at work

Considering the starting point of my analysis, the epistemic sensibility of practice-based studies and studies of organising, I arranged my analysis around some key concepts that will help me in analytically and theoretically framing the empirical case I am studying.

Looking at the emergence (creation) of feminist organising practices and their maintenance over time, my empirical case offered the possibility of looking at the relationship between theories and practices and the process of organising, and I thus wanted to look in a very concrete and processual way at this work as it happened. Parallely, I wanted to explore what kind of organising processes were in place in an organisation that stemmed from a peculiar refusal of institutions and institutionalisation, as described above, that has been active for 40 years and *actively* engaged in the production and dissemination of texts and theories. Are the practices of the *Libreria* themselves somehow institutionalised? Or how does it work, in practice, for them to be maintained over time? And moreover, how has the stability of the *Libreria* and its organising influenced the broader

process of the institutionalisation of feminism?

‘Performativity’ can be mobilised as a concept inquiring into the productive relationship between theories and practices; the concept of ‘translation’ gives a practical and contextual explanation to this relationship while also accounting for its spreading over time and space. Finally, I have employed the idea of ‘symbolic institutional maintenance’ as a concept capable of making sense of how narrative acts and discursive formations can contribute to the maintenance of an institution.

2.3.1 The work of meanings and symbolic institutional maintenance

Looking at the *Libreria*, I was interested in studying the processual and recursive work that an organisation engages with in order to become what it is. Having contextualised the emergence of feminist organising in the broader socio-political *milieu* of the second wave feminist movement (cf. chapter 4) as a way to address the relationship between the emergence of a type of organisation and a broader institutional context, I still needed to account for the active role of the *Libreria* in constituting itself.

Within the broader and successful frame of institutional theory (Greenwood et al. 2008), the concept of institutional work has been introduced in order to focus on “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006: 215). Research on institutional work have developed by focusing not only on actors and the type of work they are engaged in, but also on the conceptualisation of the nature of institutional work, especially in relation to the issue of agency and intentionality (Lawrence et al. 2013). The work of creating, maintaining and disrupting is understood as “creative and knowledgeable, product of interaction with social and material dimension” carried out in such a way that the actor “may or may not achieve its desired ends and which interacts with existing social and technological structures in unintended and unexpected ways”

(Lawrence and Suddaby 2006: 219). In this sense, institutional work, by granting more prominence to the issue of agency and its relationship with institutions in the practical dimension (Lawrence et al. 2009), contributes to shifting the attention from the macro dynamics of fields to the lived experience of organisational actors and its double-sided influence on institutions (Lawrence et al. 2011). In fact, institutional work, understood as practical and situated in institutional action, aims to take into consideration the contribution of practice theories, with whom it shares the attempt to overcome certain limitations: namely, the all-encompassing influence of culture and institutions on organisations and their practices with little space left to the actor's agency, and the extreme opposite view according to which a "hyper-muscular" institutional entrepreneur shapes institutions individually, rationally, and somehow heroically (Lawrence et al. 2009). This notion thus constitutes a mediating position between the two extremes, even though, in formulating the overall program, the focus on "purposive action" slips into a perspective that is somehow still attracted to the idea of fairly strong independence and agency (Raviola 2010).

However, a focus on actors and actions alone is not sufficient to grasp organising processes, as the seminal work by Tammar Zilber (2002) on the institutionalisation of a rape centre in Israel shows. Zilber's conceptualisation of actors as carriers of institutional meaning, and her reading of their interpretative work as agency, helped me in observing a feminist space in which actors and actions were either 'governed' by or the active proponents (the bookstore hosts philosophers and theorists active in meaning-generation work) of feminist meaning. The work of meaning consists in "the interpretations, understandings and shared belief that are produced and processed through social action, and specifically through the efforts of institutional actors engaged in power relations and political negotiations, as these are all embedded within particular socio-cultural and historical moments" (Zilber 2008: 163). The relevance of meaning in institutional work is also captured by Raviola and Nörbäck's study (2013) on Italian business newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Looking at the

process of attributing meaning to new practices stemming from changes in technology, the authors examine the process of “making action meaningful” as institutional work itself (Raviola and Nörbäck 2013: 1187). Specifically, meanings are mobilised through comparison with a reference framework (what the authors call the “law book”, Raviola and Nörbäck 2013: 1189) constituted by past experiences, actions and meanings activated in the print newspaper. To state this idea differently, present meanings are negotiated in relation to a past that is mobilised in setting the bases for future ones.

Institutions are built upon and supported by a shared system of meanings, articulated in different kinds of texts and discursive devices; hence, institutionalisation involves the production, dissemination and consumption of texts (Zilber 2009). Moreover, the focus on discursive and ideational aspects in organising is also crucial - together with relational and interpersonal ones - to shed light on mechanism of identity work formation (McInnes and Corlett 2012). Identity work signals the process through which organisations recursively and temporarily stabilise their distinctiveness (Alvesson et al. 2015). In fact, the traditional view of identity as a stable and enduring characteristic of the organisation (cf. Albert and Whetten 1985; Whetten 2006), is challenged by reflections suggesting a more fluid view of identity, a complex notion, with a socially constructed and processual nature (Alvesson et al. 2015) that, as such, is positioned as influencing and influenced by the institutional environment (Czarniawska and Wolff 1998).⁵

⁵ Identity is a root construct in organisation studies, “in that every entity needs to have a sense of who or what it is, who or what other entities are, and how the entities are associated” (Ashforth et al. 2008: 326). In recognising the importance of this concept, I chose for this dissertation to focus on a different path. The study is interested in investigating processes of institutionalisation of practices and their relation with a broad institutional and theoretical milieu, also in relation with the issue of their transmission and therefore continuity, and as such it seemed to me that the institutional work literature, with its focus

Accordingly, narrative acts constitute organisational identity (cf. Czarniawska 2008b) and, unravelling at societal, organisational and individual levels they also produce symbolic institutional maintenance. This work, unfolding via a process of interpretation and translation in which meanings are recursively transformed as they travel across levels, is seen as contributing to the strengthening of the institutional order (Zilber 2009). In defining meaning as “those aspects of institutions that are ideational and symbolic, to distinguish them from the material aspects [...]” (Zilber 2008: 152) the author proposes a division (between ideational and material aspects) that serves only analytical purposes, as the symbolic and material are co-related: “meanings are encoded in structures and practices, while structure and practices express and effect these meanings” (Zilber 2008: 152). The question thus becomes, how does this process of entwining meanings and the material happen in practice? In contrast to the unidirectional and static work represented by the idea of diffusion, which gives pre-eminence to the idea of an ‘original’ source and a passive recipient, the concept of ‘translation’ suggests a processual interaction and modification (Zilber 2006, 2008; Sahlin and Wedlin 2008).

Whereas the ‘diffusion’ metaphor comes from physics and connotes transmission of a given entity from one area to another,

on creation and maintenance, was apt to capture the width of analysis as well the different layers of observation, from practices to the broader socio-cultural milieu in which the organisation is embedded (cf. chapter 3.3.4, where, borrowing the expression by Nicolini 2012, I refer to this ‘change of lense’ as Zoom in, Zoom out). Moreover, although recent studies underline a more fluid and composite view of identity (thus somehow overcoming the first two characteristics of centrality and stability comprised in Albert and Whetten 1985 notion), it seems to me that the concept of distinctiveness (or difference) is still important in framing, even if temporarily, the concept of identity. Thus, I was unsure in respect to how to talk about organisational identity in a study that does not have a comparative nature.

the 'translation' metaphor comes from linguistics and connotes an interaction that involves negotiation between parties and reshaping what is finally transmitted (institutionalised). Thus, instead of thinking of fixed structures, practices and meanings as moving across various boundaries, we are dealing with transformations of ideational and material objects in the process of their movement and adoption. (Zilber 2006: 283)

2.3.2 Traveling ideas

Research in the tradition of Scandinavian Institutionalism (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Czarniawska 2008a) devoted attention to the ways ideas circulate and its consequences for organising (Sahlin and Wedlin 2008), conceptualising the type of circulation involved in this process as 'translation'. Introduced by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) and building on the sociology of Bruno Latour (1986) (cf. Zilber 2008), this metaphor indicates the 'traveling' of ideas across space and time (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). The concept of translation has been used to account for the process of spreading institutional elements such as ideas, practices, models, structures, and logics (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996), and is able to account for reciprocal, non-unidirectional work in which what is translated is transformed and modified according to the new context and settings (Sahlin-Andersson 1996) and through the active role of actors, such as organisation members and their preferences (Pallas et al. 2016) or their work of meaning-attribution (Fredriksson and Pallas 2017).

Since I needed a concept capable of capturing the recursive influence of theories and practices and the process of organising, the idea of 'translation' seemed suitable for making sense of my phenomenon. I employ the idea not so much for its insights into the spread of practices in time and space, although it could be employed in

that way to frame my case study as a micro story;⁶ rather, I make use of it to frame and signal the kind of recursive and material work that occurs between theories and practices and involves their reciprocal reshaping. This process can be conceptualised as “the inclusive, ongoing process of materialization of ideas, of turning ideas into objects and actions and *then again* into other ideas” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996: 13).⁷ In keeping with this premise, as my aim was to examine the process of organising in relation to the theories, practices and ideas of Feminism of Difference, I found the concept of ‘inscription’ as “exteriorization of organizing norms onto tangible technical installations and apparatuses” (Joerges and Czarniawska 1998: 372) particularly useful. Inscription is the organised and materially-based process through which institutional norms or ideas are embedded in the material and technical world (Czarniawska 2014a: 66), and it enters the organisational realm, for example, as the adoption and re-shaping mechanism of institutional logics in practice as they travel across organisational fields (Lindberg 2014), or as the concrete objectification of actions and connections in action nets (Lindberg and Czarniawska 2006). Therefore, the process of translation is conceptualised as a concrete one, one that occurs in the material dimension: in order for an idea to travel, it must become an object (Czarniawska and Joerges 1995), where ‘object’ means not only things and models, but also texts (Czarniawska 2014a: 111), a central element of my case study. Paraphrasing Sahlin-Andersson’s argument (1996; Sahlin and Wedlin 2008), translation implies the co-construction of meaning: when the idea becomes embedded in its new context, it is

⁶ The story would be: a specification of a global idea (feminism) into a local one (Italian Feminism of Difference) materialised and is created by an organisation (*Libreria delle Donne*), as part of a broader story of translation. This micro story has at its back a more global and historically bounded process of materialisation: the emergence of feminism in Western countries (glocal idea) and its materialisation (books, media, institutions).

⁷ Italics added.

edited and transformed. Translation thus implies not only materiality as the grounds for the movement of ideas, but also a performative dimension insofar as what is translated is also re-constructed and acted upon (Lindberg 2014).

2.3.3 Performativity and materiality

The concept of ‘performativity’ as translated by Organisation and Management Studies (Diedrich et al. 2013; Gond et al. 2016), can be helpful in inquiring into the productive relationship between texts, theories and organisational practices. Callon’s work on economy, economics and markets and their relations (Callon 1998; 2010) has argued that economy is not engaged in observing how a thing – economy – functions, but rather “economics, with the multiplicity of frames of analysis and theoretical models that it develops, contributes to the constitution of the object that it studies” (Callon 2010: 163), thus articulating the concept of ‘performativity’ as the process through which theory is brought into being (Gond and Cabantous 2016). This idea has been then built upon by organisational scholars to show how, when theories are used and acted upon, they influence organisational practices (Beunza et al. 2006), and this acceptance actively contributes to the persistence of theories themselves (Cabantous and Gond 2011). If taken as methodological principle, performativity in Organisation Studies guides the researcher in paying attention not only to the productive agency of discursive formulations, but also, and more relevantly, in thinking organisations as non-entities, as a set of repeated practices. In other words, the researcher’s gaze should follow actions and the work that goes into them. As Diedrich et al. explain: “rather than focusing on what has already been stabilised, “the organization”, we suggest using actions as a starting point when studying organizational phenomena, on the premise that connections between actions allow a more elaborated understanding of the ongoing process of organizing” (Diedrich et al. 2013: 17).

Performativity is also useful in contexts that call for a critical

unveiling of the hidden nexuses between ideological formations and structures of everyday life and this is particularly relevant in a feminist theory context. The notion of performativity as formulated by Judith Butler for example entails a view of gender as a “performative accomplishment” (Butler, 1988: 520) going beyond the individual sphere as it is socially, historically and discursively constituted. There is not a factual dimension to the gender reality that exists instead only insofar it is performed. Butler herself clarifies how performativity here is not indicating that gender attributes are expressive,⁸ they do not reveal an entity, but they are constitutive of it. This notion advancing the understanding of how gender is done but also undone (Butler 2004) in social life and has influenced studies dealing with gender and organisational life.

In keeping with a perspective that rejects the gender neutrality of workplaces – organisation themselves are gendered and do gender (Acker 1990, Gherardi 1994), studies have, for example, indicated how to capture the way in which gender is done in organisations, suggesting to look at the concrete practising of gender, in the real time and fast, often irreflexive moment of gender performances (Martin 2003, 2006), so to better focus on and to capture the social, discursive, material and relational formulation that constitute gender as a practice through social interaction (the reference here is to West and Zimmerman 1987, which represents another tradition besides the poststructuralist one influencing the researches on gender and organising, cf. Kelan 2010). For example, studies have shed light on how the doing of gender in the organisation can be reinforcing gendered stereotypical norms, devaluing and discriminating women or cancelling their gendered identities (Gherardi and Poggio 2001, Czarniawska 2006). Other studies have focused on examples of practices of positively undoing gender that is, resisting to the imposed and restricted binary gender norms and

⁸ Here Butler clarifies the distance from Goffman (1959) [1956] view of gender as role or display of a self (cf. Butler 1988: 528).

stereotypes and creating new possibilities. For example, although women in male dominated industries, like ICT, suffer disqualification, their active resistance can be conceptualised as a way to challenge gendered assumptions, generating new meanings attached to being a woman in traditionally masculine settings (Kelan 2010). This is an example of undoing gender by displacing it; of course resistance and negotiation can happen also for male in (certain) female occupations engaged in resisting gender norms (McDonald 2013). Other examples of positive undoing might be those generating practices and discourses on gender pluralisation, for example the articulated embodiment of feminine, masculine and ungended practices in the experiences of transgender that thus constitute a way of challenging gender norms by underdoing them (Thanem and Wallberg 2016).

Taking performativity into consideration in organisational analysis also entails an interest in materiality: discursive practices have a material dimension (Gond and Cabantous 2016). Indeed, Callon himself suggests that the term 'performance' be used rather than 'performativity' (Callon 1998: 23) precisely to underline the role of materialities in action (cf. MacKenzie et al. 2008: 15), emphasised by another term, 'agencements', that points to a distribution of agency in sociotechnical arrangements, both human and non-human.

Practices themselves as bundles of doing and sayings are crucial to the feminist intellectual horizon, and by definition they cannot be thought of as only theoretical constructs. First because in feminist practices the performative dimension is reflexive: we encounter theories that affirm their relationship and debt to the practices of the movement, which in turn rest on practices that are the material and embodied account of what has been theorised. Secondly for the relevance accorded to materiality: the body of the person who is doing/saying is involved, as is the space in which the practices are performed. Space is indeed a crucial dimension to understanding the unfolding of practices in the feminist tradition. How do they interact with and how is their unravelling enabled in the organisation space;

how does their presence affect the nature of theorisation happening in and by the organisation, along with other issues, were concerns in my study. Second wave feminist organisations, at least from what I was able to ascertain concerning the Italian *milieu*, stem from a history in which a recognition of the importance of bodily sociality and its political dimension created the condition for feminist organisations to constitute themselves. As I show in chapter 5, organisations such as libraries, bookstores, documentation centres, etc. were constituted as alternatives to both the private dimension of houses (where consciousness raising was carried out) and the “cold” atmosphere of the headquarters of political organisations, thus once again underlying the centrality of space in feminist organising.

The physical presence of women in the bookstore was particularly important in my reasoning for another reason as well. In my field study I viewed the aged bodies of theorists, librarians and activists as inscriptions of the feminist institution, on one hand, and as a symbol of its status, on the other. There is no doubt, therefore, that attention to materiality is a crucial dimension of my observation of an organisation. As matter of fact, feminist theories are among the main forces that have influenced organisation theory to consider the body a relevant site for analysis – both as object of inquiry and in considering the embodiment of the writing or research process (Thanem 2016).

Taking materiality into consideration in organisation means being attentive to not only bodies (Wanda Orlikowski defines bodies as among the visible aspect of materiality in organisational practices, Orlikowski 2007: 1436), but also to artefacts, objects, and technology. Science and technology studies (for example Callon and Law 2005; Latour 2005) not only argued that objects are also socially constructed (Czarniawska 2008a), but it also showed how they can be considered social actors in their own right. In other words, agency pertains not only to human but also to non-human actors (artefacts, technology, etc.) that participate in and influence social life as well. Organisational studies influenced by this tradition understand materiality as a crucial

concern for institutional analyses (Czarniawska 2008a) as well. Orlikowski's (2007) essay, for instance, argues that all practices are always and necessarily *sociomaterial*, and that this feature is not incidental to but constitutive of the process of organising (Orlikowski 2007).

Moving beyond these conceptual difficulties and conventional approaches requires a way of engaging with the everyday materiality of organizational life that does not ignore it, take it for granted, or treat it as a special case [...] Such an alternative view asserts that materiality is integral to organizing, positing that the social and the material are constitutively entangled in everyday life. A position of constitutive entanglement does not privilege either humans or technology (in one-way interactions), nor does it link them through a form of mutual reciprocation (in two-way interactions). Instead, the social and the material are considered to be inextricably related – there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social. (Orlikowski 2007: 1437)

The de-centring of the human subject implied in this vision, and thus the idea that agency is the product of non-humans, has implications for the conceptualisation of the doing of agency in institutional work. The study by Raviola and Nörbäck (Raviola and Nörbäck 2013) constitutes an example of empirical work in which materiality is central not only in the understanding of institutional work but also in triggering it. The (human and non-human) actions involved in such work derive meaning from a previous institution (printed news production) as inscribed in material platforms (newspapers).

2.4 Chapter summary

My research looks at a case of feminist organising, by which I mean that I am interested in the practical and organisational dimension that exists around the theoretical constructs of feminism. Or, to put it differently, I am interested in the recursive relationship between two processes: a specific kind of theorising (feminist theory) and its practical dimension (its organising.) My empirical study considers *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano, a feminist bookstore, and a political subject with a well-recognised role in defining and disseminating a specific theoretical orientation in feminist theory (Italian Feminism of Difference). Considering meanings in their content and adaptation, as well as the process through which they are materialised as practices and transformed over time, and devoting particular attention to spatial and bodily arrangements, I inquire into the processual and practice-based work of creating an organisation. In parallel, I historically contextualise the emergence of this organisation, asking which relationships this process maintains with a broader theoretical and historical arena. Finally, I ask if and how the work of creating and maintaining this feminist organisation and the institutionalisation of its practices over time has purposively influenced the constitution and maintenance of the institution of Feminism of Difference, or not.

The next chapter outlines how I organised my study and how I tried to operationalise the issues above in practice.

Chapter 3

Methodology

You may add the word “God” to a sermon a hundred times and yet fail to carry even the beginning of what it is to speak in a “religious” fashion.
(Latour 2011)

This chapter is about the way I approached my study, how I generated material, analysed it and wrote up my research. In my study I wanted to inquire into the emergence of feminist organising practices and how they are maintained over time; I thus chose an organisation that, founded in 1975 as a feminist bookstore, offered the possibility to examine the relationship between theories and practices in the process of organising. My aim was to investigate this relationship in a concrete and processual way as it was enacted, and in this thesis, I have tried to render the history of the bookstore and its unfolding as part of the narrative of the story of this research. This chapter begins with a section, 3.1, devoted to exploring the sense in which feminism appears in this thesis. The following section, 3.2, deals with the qualitative research methods I employed to observe organising at *Libreria* as it happened. Section 3.3 offers a more concrete account of the phases of the fieldwork I conducted and concludes with a general outline of how I organised the study.

3.1 Archaeology of a field study, or how I got involved in looking at feminist practices

This thesis *has to do with organising and feminism*. Dealing with practices, and with feminist ones specifically, has some fundamental

methodological implications: the chosen methods not only necessarily have to entail some sort of engagement in the field – it would be impossible to study practices only as *ex post* accounts – but they must also include some sort of engagement with the meanings of these practices.

Seeing as I was (and still am) very keen on the marvellous dimension that is writing, in 2015 I embarked on a writing course held at *Libreria delle Donne* and taught by Luisa Muraro with the help of Clara Jourdan. This ended up being a three-year-long endeavour for me. My encounter with feminism took place abruptly, yet it was also mediated. It was 2014 and at that point I had never heard of either the philosopher Luisa Muraro or the bookstore. As a Management student from a Business School fairly ignorant about the history of feminist movements – but knowledgeable about mainstream, North American-driven discourses on gender equality and diversity management in corporations – I found myself suddenly face to face with lectures by one of the most “inventive, influential, and intransigent thinkers” of Italian feminist theory (Murphy 2018: xxiii). At the same time, however, my encounter did not take place through the solitary reading of texts; it was mediated by the fact that it happened within an organisation space and with other people, listening to *in presentia* speeches and observing feminist practices. To say that my field study lasted 6 years might be a retrospective exaggeration, but my questions, interest, and involvement undoubtedly began at that moment. Moreover, memories from the time as well as my class notebooks retrospectively functioned as meaningful texts for me to make sense of.

In different ways and via different traditions, the idea of engagement with research as a productive, knowledge-generating opportunity is incorporated into “second wave”¹ Western feminist epistemologies which, reflecting on the nature of knowledge, reason,

¹ I explore the use of the term and implications of this metaphor in the chronology of feminism in chapter 4.

and the knowing subject, have articulated a critique of the notion of neutrality and objectivity, the neat separation between object and subject, and the constitution of the two categories (Hawkesworth 1987; Hekman 1987; Hemmings 2011). These critiques are part of a broader history of critiquing rationalism and positivism, and have been developed by other traditions as well,² but my focus here is on feminist contributions. Many feminist thinkers involved in this critique have highlighted the connection between positivistic epistemologies, their set of dichotomous oppositions, and masculinity (Kelly et al. 1987; Irigaray 1998 [1974]; Rivera Garretas 1998).

For example, Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero reads rational dualism and its binary economy as rooted in the fundamental subject-object divide, the one between male and female. The polarisation of men as subjects and women as objects is the model for generating an oppositional structure in which one pole is considered positive while the other has negative, or less valuable, attributes. This is, of course, a result of the fact that it is those who occupy the subject position – those who are not constructed and represented as “Other”,

² For example, the research traditions in Organisation Studies that have diverged from the epistemological tenets of positivism and rationalism and are engaged in practice-based, constructivist and postmodern views of organising (cf. for example Corradi et al. 2010; Czarniawska and Joerges 1995; Alvesson and Deetz 1996), and views that consider emotions and sensibility to be relevant aspects of knowledge in and about organisations (Gagliardi 2007). cf. also Michael Reed’s (2006) comprehensive historical review of the intellectual development of the field of Organisation Studies, and specifically pp. 31-2 in which he presents these approaches (including ethnomethodology, postmodernist approaches to organisation culture, and actor-network theory) that “radically re-define and re-locate the study of organisation away from its intellectual roots in rationalist/functionalist ontologies and positivist epistemologies” (Reed 2006: 31). Silverman (1970), Weick (1969), Braverman (1974), Burrell and Morgan (1979) are considered classic works representing early attempts to create “alternatives to orthodox perspectives” (Clegg and Hardy 2006: 429).

who hold the power of representation and self-representation. It is this founding dichotomy – men/subject – women/Other – from which all the others derive.

The list can be infinite, and counts widely known dichotomies, as culture/nature, reason/passion, mind/body, public/private, etc. It's a vast and articulated system that positions and normalises men and women, offering to daily language a set of identities, that is to say, the masculine and feminine stereotypes that become behavioural models. (Cavarero 2002b: 84)

Adriana Cavarero thus worked to unravel how Western philosophy has masked a male-centred discourse under the idea of neutrality and how this subject assumed the quality of universality (Restaino 2002b), a “‘monstrous’ universal, at once neuter and male” (De Lauretis 1990: 4). The strength of this system, therefore, derives specifically from this masked universality, as Catharine McKinnon states: “male dominance is perhaps the most pervasive and tenacious system of power in history, but because it is metaphysically nearly perfect. Its point of view is the standard for point-of-viewlessness, its particularity the meaning of universality” (MacKinnon 1983: 639).

As a result, feminist thinkers have built on these critical analyses to develop notions such as standpoint epistemologies (Hartsock 1987 [1983]; Harding 1987a, 1993, 2004a), advocating for a socio-historical contextualisation of the research process and assumptions so as to render the researcher herself open to critical scrutiny. In this tradition but more incisively, and problematising the identity politics of understanding marginalised perspectives as privileged ones, Donna Haraway (1988) has stressed that the knowing subject is always embodied (comprising in this notion the forms of technological mediation that ground, produce and reproduce the subject), and thus produced and re-produced, mediated and situated in a partial, non-exhaustive perspective.

Similarly, but granting primacy to the role of the relational net in which the subject is caught, the notion of *pensiero dell'esperienza* ("experiential knowledge") (Buttarelli and Giardini 2008) has been conceptualised in the Italian tradition as a methodological sensitivity generated by the practices of the Italian women's movement. By virtue of her own experience, finitude and suffering in and with the world, a relational subject acquires a sort of "competence on the world" (Muraro 2006 [1991]; Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987). These two expressions capture the fallacies of a supposedly objective, non-involved subject in the practice of research, and the way that feeling-thinking go hand in hand in processes of developing knowledge about the world (on thinking as always already feeling, cf. Muraro 1996).³ Even though it is not explicitly formalised, Carla Lonzi's work is also an important source of inspiration for thinking about research methodology in Italian feminist tradition, an approach rooted in an understanding of the relational and embodied dimensions. Italian theorist and writer Carla Lonzi (1931-1982), a fundamental figure of Italian feminism (Carla Lonzi and her feminist collective *Rivolta Femminile* are treated in chapter 4, the following chapter, on the history of Italian feminism), shows through her writing what it means to use experience and interiority as material for knowledge-production and what it means to be involved with one's own research.

Lonzi was a brilliant art critic, the pupil of art historian Roberto Longhi (1890-1970). After writing the seminal and innovative – in relation to the tradition of art critique of the time – book *Autoritratto*

³ For a similar take on the feeling-thinking pairing and on the critique of the binary opposition between rationality and emotions seen as a sense-making device in other feminist works cf. for example Ferguson (1984): "our emotions are one of the ways in which we know the world, and are thus not the opposite of reason. We need the connection to the world that emotion allows in order to reflect on and evaluate that world" (Ferguson 1984: 199).

(1969), she abandoned art criticism to devote herself to feminism.⁴ In *Autoritratto* ("Self-portrait"), Lonzi creates a fictional dialogic setting in which she interacts with fourteen important artists of the time (the artists involved were Carla Accardi, Getulio Alviani, Enrico Castellani, Pietro Consagra, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Nigro, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Mimmo Rotella, Salvatore Scarpitta, Giulio Turcato and Cy Twombly). The setting is fictional in the sense that the dialogue occurs in the fabric of text, constructed as a montage of the interviews she conducted (separately) with the fourteen artists. In the dialogue, Carla – the critic – and her questions are present and visible in the text as she asks the artists about personal matters instead of questions exclusively related to their artistic personas, and intersperses the texts with private childhood photos instead of an iconographic apparatus of works of art.⁵ The resulting text stakes out a new method of art criticism, advocating for an idea of research that is about entering into dialogue with artists, individuals stripped of their aura as autonomous and creative geniuses. In the preface of the book, Lonzi reflects on her research process and concludes by saying that, in the practice of writing the book, the research process changed her: "'Have I become an artist?', she asks herself. 'No', she answers, 'but I am no longer a stranger'" (Lonzi 2010a [1969]: 5). Lonzi's realisation of no longer being a stranger to artistic research has multiple implications,

⁴ Clearly, this is only one way to narrate the story of a feminist icon. Scholars (notably, Giovanna Zapperi 2017) have recently argued that portraying her intellectual history as divided between art criticism and feminist theorising does not do justice to Lonzi's production: on one hand, her scholarship in art criticism also contains seeds of feminist critique, so that we could speak of a feminist art criticism even in the Italian *milieu*, and on the other hand her later production was always interested in issues of cultural production, critique and distribution. *Vai pure* (1980) is an example of such mixture, as is some collective texts she wrote as part of the group *Rivolta Femminile*.

⁵ Art historians Laura Iamurri (2011; 2016) and Giovanna Zapperi (2015; 2017) have worked extensively in analysing and contextualising *Autoritratto*.

the most obvious of which is her realisation that she is a writer in her own right, a creator, a person to whom the artistic sphere is not extraneous (not only a critic whose function was to allow the genius personality to unfold). It also means that encountering Art changes us and has to do with us, even if we are not artists in the traditional sense of producers of works of art.

This idea of not being a stranger in the research process can be framed as involvement and participation in the research setting, as conceptualised by the social research tradition as well. This involvement is expressed for example in the position of *participant observation*, a key role in organisational ethnography (Van Maanen 1986) that entails the researcher taking part in, and becoming socialised in and knowledgeable about, the activities he or she observes (Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) [1983]; Emerson et al. 2001). In this tradition, however, too much involvement and extreme closeness to the research 'other' is conceptualised as risky, potentially impairing a sound research process. "Going native" (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001; Rock 2001) is the expression used to articulate the risk of doing research in a way that involves being unreflexively caught up in the research field and practitioners' accounts.⁶ The idea of reflexivity also implies the involvement of the researching subject, as it is based upon the recognition that it is impossible to eliminate the research presence in the process of observation and theory-making (cf. Clegg and Hardy 2006).

Un-estrangement in Lonzi's work also acquires other features. Not being a stranger evokes a dimension that has to do not only with knowledge – an insider involved in the activities that she is observing – but also with the affective and political dimension. Lonzi realises that

⁶ It has been argued, however, that the expression is problematic as it is an intrinsically orientalist expression (Marcus 2001) reinforcing a strong division between subject and object of research.

she is no longer a stranger at the end of her research process;⁷ she does not assume this position as a research guideline. Not being a stranger is the outcome of a way of doing research that transforms the researching subject. Moreover, as expressed by Maria Luisa Boccia, the Italian political philosopher who wrote the first study on Carla Lonzi (Boccia 1990), as a result of Lonzi's relational writing style, the question of involvement in her thought "passes onto" the reader, who is called and questioned by the reflections and methodologies she proposes.

Therefore, un-estrangement is about being implicated in the research process so that the writing itself carries this implication. For now, I have adopted this concept of un-estrangement by simplifying it to signal at once my (political) engagement with the story I am writing about⁸ and my involvement in the practice. This involvement is in itself a living process, as it changed and transformed as soon as I began by PhD and developed my study; it is something that I also lost along the way and am perhaps only weaving back in now as I engage in the practice of writing.

3.2 Studying organising

This study focuses on *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* and the way theories and practices intertwine in the organising dimension. I have investigated the *Libreria* by inquiring into the historical context in which it emerged and the ideational aspects connected to the

⁷ The phrase about not being a stranger appears in the book's preface, which was plausibly written once the book, and therefore the research process, was concluded.

⁸ Clare Hemmings (2001) underlines the importance of narrations in feminist research because they contribute to fostering the existence of diverse narratives, enriching and challenging mainstream ones.

emergence and maintenance of this form of organising (texts, theories, narrated accounts). I was particularly interested in both reconstructing and understanding the history, context of reference and theories produced by the bookstore, and also in observing and participating in the unfolding of its day-to-day activities in order to better understand the flow of the life of the bookstore and to ascertain if and how participants' relationship with the theoretical construct was taking place in practice. Therefore, I combined a field study with a study on the history of the bookstore that I conducted by looking at archival documents covering thirty years of organisational life.

3.2.1 ...Historically

An acknowledgement of the importance of the historical gaze is implicit when looking at practices, as they are contextually and historically bound (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017; Nicolini 2012; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016); moreover, given that organisations are embedded in geographical, social, historical and cultural *milieux*, attention to context and historical specificities is key (Lippman and Aldrich 2014; Suddaby et al. 2014), as is the recognition that the past is 'used' by organisational actors in different ways in the organisational processes (Wadhvani et al. 2018). Attention to cultural and historical dynamics can be found, for example, in some empirical works grounded in the institutional work perspective (cf. the study by Hirsch and Bermiss 2009 on the de-institutionalisation of the socialist economic regime in Czech Republic from 1989 onwards that proposes a new type of institutional work category, "institutional preservation").

More explicitly, the expression "historic turn" (Clark and Rowlinson 2004) or, more simply, *reorientation* in organisation theory (Üsdiken and Kieser 2004),⁹ frames scholars' interest in and

⁹ The authors outline three positions on the employment of history and historical research methods in Organisation Studies: *supplementarist*, *integrationist* and *reorientationist*. The last one re-orientes the study of

engagement with history as a relevant dimension in organisation research (Rowlinson 2016), as testified by several recent publications devoted to the relationship between history and management and Organisation Studies, as pointed out by Roy Suddaby (2016) in his overview of the historic turn phenomenon. Although this shift indicates growing interest, it is nevertheless considered still “underarticulated” in management and Organisation Studies (Wadwani and Decker 2017). Michael Rowlinson argues that interest in the historical dimension of phenomena should also be accompanied, in sound research efforts, by reflexive engagement with historical theory and historiography (Rowlinson et al. 2014; Rowlinson 2016); otherwise, studies risk remaining incomplete, examples of merely incorporating historical data into the research. For Matthias Kipping and Behlül Üsdiken (2014), engaging “seriously” with history entails accounting for the origins, use, and analysis of historical sources and dialoguing with history research. The two scholars refer to the effort to merge historical complexity with theory-building efforts in organisation and management theory (for example, in the formulation of hypotheses considering context specificity) as “historical cognizance” (Kipping and Üsdiken 2014). Along these lines, Mairi Maclean, Charles Harvey and Stuart Clegg (Maclean et al. 2016) outline some key principles in carrying out historical organisational studies, with the principle of “dual integrity” being especially key. The idea is that a study should succeed in respecting the standards of both disciplines and possibly contributing to both.

Although I am not sure of the outcome, I did take seriously the significance of the points outlined above. I considered it crucial for the understanding of the phenomenon at hand to look at the historical *milieu* in which it developed. I therefore contextualised, via secondary sources, the emergence of feminist organisations in the broader socio-

organisations in a more substantive fashion in that it “involves moving organization studies away from its social scientific aspirations based on the natural sciences model” (Üsdiken and Kieser 2004: 324).

political *milieu* of second wave feminist movement (cf. chapter 4), drawing primarily on feminist historiography. Indeed, according to Martin (1990) looking at the founding circumstances of feminist organisations - one of the ten salient dimensions of studying feminist organising according to her - sheds light on their relation with the feminist movement and allow to clarify their structure, practice and characteristics. By accessing primary sources as part of my archival study, I also framed the organising practice of the Milan Women's Bookstore in relation to early attempts of feminist organising (cf. chapter 5, devoted to the emergence and conceptualisation of the 'practice of doing'). While working in the archives - the one I consulted most extensively was the Libreria delle Donne Archive held at Fondazione Elvira Badaracco in Milan (cf. section 3.3 for a more detailed account) - I considered texts composed by *Libreria* members. Following document-based traces dating back to the Seventies, I was able to reconstruct the organising history of the bookstore, especially in terms of the phases leading to its creation, thereby shedding light on the meaning, motives, and logics behind its foundation.

3.2.2 ...In practice

Looking at archival texts was not only an effort to understand and gain familiarity with the broader historical landscape; it was also a way to delve into the symbolic dimension that constituted the bookstore's horizon of thought, thus attempting to look at the work of meaning as constructed. Tammar B. Zilber (2008) suggests that we not only reconstruct the process of meaning production as completed but also engage in studies *in vivo* and *in situ* that examine the unfolding of meaning creation, use, and enactment. I was interested in looking at the life of the *Libreria* and its members as actors actively engaged in *doing the bookstore*; that is to say, I was interested in the concrete experience of organisational actors, as this experience is recursively connected to "the institutions that structure and are structured by it" (Lawrence et al. 2011).

In their ethnographic study, Elena Raviola and Maria Nörbäck (Raviola and Nörbäck 2013, drawing on Raviola 2010) employ narrative episodes connected to their fieldwork to construct an understanding of different types of (human and non-human) agency and institutional work (*divergence, convergence, misvergence*). Their work, as Lawrence et al. note (Lawrence et al. 2013), “highlights the mundane, ordinary ways in which institutions are embodied at a micro level and how actors engage with them in their day-to-day activities. Their ethnographic methods allowed them to attend to the experience of individuals as they engaged in, and were subjected to, institutional work”. Accordingly, I am not focusing on finished and completed actions; rather, I have looked at purposive actions the consequences of which are always precarious. The effort of institutional work is aimed at maintaining, but the outcome is uncertain, perhaps impermanent. Therefore, an ethnographic focus on day-to-day activities allowed me to look at the process as it happened, without commenting on the final results. While a retrospective gaze allowed me to look at the process of institutional creation as completed, at least as far as formal aspects are concerned, the question of the maintenance of the bookstore as an organisation and, even more so, of feminism as an institution, is far from decided once and for all.

Therefore, concretely, I opted to spend time in the bookstore either observing activities, participating in them or having conversations with members of the collective. In other words, I conducted fieldwork in the very simple sense that I observed a field of practice in which even theorising constitutes a type of practice (Czarniawska 2014b). My concrete approach of observing activities as they happen in their everyday context, participating in them and conducting informal interviews also qualifies my study as ethnographic (Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) [1983]; Atkinson et al. 2001) or, more specifically, an organisational ethnographic study (Ybema et al. 2009).

Looking at organising as it happens and focusing on the

temporal fixities of organisations allows us to look at micro-level dynamics of meaning-generation and travel (Zilber 2008). The ethnographic approach is therefore considered suitable for investigating institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Zilber 2002), which applies to my thesis insofar as it explores the issue of the institutionalisation of feminism in relation to organising practices in the bookstore. Moreover, this method that enables concrete observations in the flow of actions and relations is in line with conceptualisations of organising as ongoing construction, thus calling for a performative, processual and material (Feldman 2000; Czarniawska 2002; Diedrich et al.; Lindberg 2014) as well as practice-based understanding of organising (Nicolini 2011). This is not only true in that it offers the possibility of witnessing actions and performances as they happen (Nicolini 2017), but also because of the inherently material dimension in which the researcher is socialised as she experiences scenes of action, crucial settings for appraising the role and function of artefacts and other mediators in organisational life (Nicolini 2012).

Only through immersing oneself and being there is one capable of appreciating, understanding, and translating the situated, creative, interpretive and moral nature of the actual practices of organizing. At the same time, the ethnographic approach helps us appreciate that work practices do not take place in a vacuum and that people's organizational lives are shaped both through individual agency and historical conditions. (Nicolini 2009: 120)

Moreover, ethnographical research as a long-term, contextually bound process wherein the researcher observes and participates immersed in a setting that she shares with the observed, interacting with them in an accountable way, is employed by and suited to (various intellectual

traditions of)¹⁰ feminist-oriented studies in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies (Skeggs 2001).¹¹ This affinity is due not only to the fact that fieldwork provides the basis for documenting the unfolding of women's experiences and giving prominence to their voices from their own point of view (Reinhartz 1992), but also because such research approaches are ways to "take into account the multifaceted ways in which subjects are produced through the historical categories and context in which they are placed and which they precariously inhabit" (Skeggs 2001: 433). Nevertheless, and exactly because it entails interpersonal relationships and contextual knowledge generation, feminist ethnography (Skeggs 1994)¹² has been understood as a fundamentally ambivalent project, the possible site of exploitation and relational conflicts (Stacey 1991). In this context dilemmas arise such as the issue of trust between researcher and interviewed, and the dilemma of oscillation between distance and closeness (Reinhartz 1991) together with associated ethical prescriptions¹³ such as the requirement that

¹⁰ Feminist ethnography is already a problematic expression seeing as both feminism and ethnographies are diverse phenomena (Skeggs 2001; Reinhartz 1992). There are several key texts that provide a comprehensive review of the different traditions comprising the constellation of feminisms. From a historical standpoint see Cavarero and Restaino (2002), while for a studies of organising perspective offering a synthetic categorisation see Gherardi 2005, and also Benschop and Verloo 2016.

¹¹ Even though, as Beverley Skeggs (2001) herself notes, the relationship between the two is problematic as on the one hand the historical genealogy of the practice is closely linked to the idea of inquiry into otherness, but on the other it also constituted a useful practice for early attempts to delve into and narrate women's lives.

¹² Beverley Skeggs (1994) defined feminist ethnography as a theory of the research process that is informed by many methods, located within feminist ontologies and epistemologies and a form of writing (cf. especially Skeggs 1994: 85-7).

¹³ Obviously, ethical concerns and solutions in the research process are not the

researchers respect and avoid exploiting their interviewees, engaging a reciprocal exchange of knowledge with them (Skeggs 2001) and ensuring accountability (Hogan 2016).

In studying feminist organising, fieldwork is central whenever possible. Numerous historical Second Wave organisations are no longer active, which means that studies of them rely on historical reconstruction (Laughlin and Castledine 2011), often supplemented by oral history interviews. These latter differ from 'normal' interviews in that they are intended as a way to access a person's past rather than being focused on a specific topic or event and considered a valid means of constructing written records of marginal voices (Renhartz 1992; for a review of the method, Reinhartz 1992; Sangster 1994; Gluck and Patai 1991). When the study deals with places which are still active, the historical reconstruction is coupled with field studies: ethnographic accounts of the life of the organisations (Iannello 1993) composed of observation and interviews can be enriched by also gathering and interpreting administrative and archival texts and material (Zilber 2002), as well as directly participating in centre activities, either as part of the research design (Zilber 2002; Buzzanell 2000) or as part of the researcher's engagement, even prior to the study, as Kristen Hogan (2016) did in her study of bookstores in USA and Canada. Hogan mixes all the above research tools (archival and documental analysis, oral history interviews) with direct participation in this history, as she previously worked at two of the organisations she then refers to in the study (BookWoman in Austin and Toronto Women's Bookstore).

3.2.3 ...And writing it

The centrality of narration in both understanding organising and the practice of writing up the research can be ascribed to a narrative approach (Czarniawska 1997): narrative knowledge is key to understanding organising in that it represents a mode of knowing and

sole prerogative of feminist research!

communicating about organisations, while at the same time it is crucial in representing, reporting, interpreting and inquiring into them (Czarniawska 1999).

Thus, a narrative approach captures the centrality of texts as the common ground on which objects and subjects of research both act. In this sense, it could be argued that while positionality or hard reflexivity is the idea of putting the researcher in the same critical plane as the object of study (Harding 1993), good writing is already positional and self-reflective, within a narrative understanding of organisational life and research in that this understanding reveals the way the practice of theorising is caught up in the same structure as the practices it seeks to represent.¹⁴

Barbara Czarniawska stresses the importance of text-based representation in social science research via the word *ergonography* (Czarniawska 1997), a neologism that nominates and thereby makes visible the activities involved in ethnographies of organisations: we are writing narratives on work organisations (Czarniawska 1997: 202), thus explicitly framing management as a practice engaged in story-writing (Czarniawska 1999). This newly coined term also substitutes the word *ethnos* with *ergon*, “work”, suggesting that an organisation scholar’s primary site of inquiry is not tribes. Such a strong reference to work might be perceived as limiting (Ybema et al. 2009), however, and so we might instead use the term *praxeology* (Mol 2002), which ‘simply’ refers to the description of practices. Studying practices requires observing and understanding them and then, crucially, granting them visible form through the work of writing, the moment in which the process of studying practices becomes visible. Practice theory itself is understood as an endeavour in which the researcher tries “to generate descriptions

¹⁴ If I have correctly read and understood Czarniawska 1991 and especially p. 191

and ‘bring worlds into being’ in the texts we compose. For this reason, the ultimate test for practice theory is neither its coherence nor elegance but its capacity to create enlightening texts” (Nicolini 2017: 24).

“In this book I enact a writing style that uses story as theory” says Hogan in the preface to her study (2016). This expression, used in the context of a book engaged in narrating the political histories of American feminist bookstores, resonates with what the Milan bookstore – which Hogan cites in the volume – wrote in 1987. In the seminal text by the Milan Women’s Bookstore collective (which I address in chapter 7) *Non credere di avere dei diritti. La generazione della libertà femminile nell’idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne* (1987), translated in English as *Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990), the authors write about their collective effort to narrate their history, conceptualising this effort as a work of theory insofar it deals with finding words for new practices: “We believe that to write theory is partly to tell about practice, since theoretical reasoning generally refers to things which already have names. Here we are dealing partly with things that had no names” (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 25). It should also be noted, however, that Hogan refers explicitly to writing style. She is engaged in showing how participation and involvement in the research process also invest the writing phase (as methodological texts such as Reinharz 1992 also show), in the sense that the presence – or authoriality – of the person who is writing is always perceptible in some way. The statement somehow makes explicit that the positional aspect of ‘being found’ in the text has not only political but also theoretical implications: writing is never conceived only as a stylistic exercise; it is also a symbolic practice wherein sense-making is wholly acted out (entirely and yet not exhaustively, as suggested by the word choice “enacting” that evokes the author’s performances, bodily presence, etc.).

3.3 The fieldwork

Following the idea that meanings are central in institutional work and working within the frame of a narrative approach to organising, I looked at the texts around me and produced by me. I thus scrutinise texts already constructed (document analysis) as well as *Libreria* members' contemporary narrations (interviews), understood as a way to access the discursive dimension of practices, the perceived meaning attached to the actions that ended up generating the bookstore and feminism.

I also engaged with the theories produced by the bookstore as a way to delve into the institutional work of symbolic institutional maintenance. Similarly, I analysed the texts and theories produced by the *Libreria* (mostly in chapter 7), presenting the organising process leading to the publication of key *Libreria* books, magazines, journals and research papers while specifically focusing on their meanings. My aim is to show, through some key texts, how specific theoretical (political and philosophical) positions took shape. Texts and platforms such as the bookstore website, considered as sites of text production (in terms of both content and practical set-up) are likewise considered not only in the sense of their meaning but also as mediating objects.

I have articulated my story around two key change-bearing events that took place in approximately the same period, 2001, namely the bookstore's physical relocation to a new space and the 'move to online' following from the collective's decision to publish a website. I interpreted these events as relevant after re-reading my field notes and finding that they appeared repeatedly in *Libreria* members' narrations: "important events become such in accounts" (Czarniawska 2004b: 776). Even though my appraisal of the events took place through retrospective accounts, thus preventing me from looking at change processes, crucial in constituting the moment of discussion, re-consideration and re-configuration of old practices (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996), as they unfolded, I approached these events as new

configurations that could be interrogated so as to understand how new practices have been constructed in relation to old ones, and why. These two events express key themes of the story of *Libreria* organising and I 'used' them as cornerstones of my story as telling about them helped me to grant a voice not only to members' stories but also to socio-material practices active in the institutional work of *Libreria delle Donne*. Such practices were articulated as a focus on the spatial setting and architecture of the bookstore as a site of inquiring into institutional inscription and as the context for bodies in relationship. I also focused on two material changes: the physical relocation and the technological one.

I treated the process of technological (setting up a new digital space for the bookstore, as represented by creating the first bookstore website) and spatial (setting up a new physical space for the bookstore, as represented by its relocation to new headquarters) change as a possible canvas for studying the process through which theories and practices are inscribed in these *normated artefacts* in which the organisation is configured.

My own texts – in the form of field notes or diary entries – made their way into the process as sites of interpretation.

In relation to my research questions, I chose this setting because *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* is a context that allows me to look at historical processes while also conducting a field study, interviewing both historical and younger members of the organisation involved in space management. The *Libreria delle Donne*, in fact, allowed me to observe organisational activities and practices in their making and establish a historical perspective at the same time. The *Libreria* was founded in 1975, during what is considered the dawning moment for feminist organisations in Italy and worldwide and a moment in which feminist thought was being developed and defined, thus enabling me to delve into its historical and theoretical genesis and study the organisation at its inception, the meanings attached to the moment of foundation, etc. Moreover, since the *Libreria* is still active, I was also

able to directly examine practices and activities in a field study and look at a process that has been consolidated over time; at the same time, this allowed me to inquire into possible change processes. It is worth noting that the *Libreria* is not only still active; it is also still run by its historical members, together with some new ones.¹⁵ The involvement of both historical and newer members in running the space allowed me to delve into narratives that cover the entire time span of the bookstore from inception to contemporary challenges, to ask about motivations and perceived changes, while talking with younger members allowed me to explore stories about the relevance of the place as well as perceived differences and challenges; also, I was able to observe relations between the two groups.

Finally, but equally importantly, the fact of already having a connection with the organisation (as a student in the writing course) helped me to establish contact and initiate the study. Not that access would have been a problem in formal terms, but this prior relationship helped me to gain acceptance as a researcher in a context that is open – a commercial bookstore – but yet also constitutes a political collective wherein legitimately being on site and asking questions requires trust.

3.3.2 Field material generation

Apart from the period in which I was engaged as a student in the life of the *Libreria* (2014-2016), and considering the third year of writing school (spring 2017) as a period of transition towards my role as observer, given that I was already enrolled in the PhD program when participating in the writing school and was therefore already looking at

¹⁵ Not all historical (born in the Seventies) feminist spaces are still active today, for example the *Libreria delle Donne* in Florence is a recent example of a feminist bookstore closing (in 2017), and not all the ones that are active are run by historical members, for example the *Libreria delle Donne di Bologna* underwent a generational shift in its management and is now run by younger activists (I interviewed both historical and newer members of the *Libreria* in Bologna).

Libreria through ‘organising’ glasses, this field study ‘officially’ started in September 2017 and lasted until September 2018. It entailed 3 main, partly overlapping phases: document collection (September-November 2017), observation (November 2017-January 2018), and interviews (December 2017-September 2018).

The collection and analysis of materials were both conducted in two rounds. The first round was conducted before the set of interviews began, while a second phase of document collection took place during the interviews as some women shared texts, leaflets or photos with me.

Document collection

Document collection started in September 2017 and ended in approximately November 2017. I also conducted a second round of material consultation in January 2018 to search for other information and confirm hypotheses I had developed during the interviews. A final visit to the archive was conducted in the final phase of writing up the dissertation.

The archives I relied upon are:

- Libreria delle Donne Archive [Archivio politico della *Libreria delle Donne* di via Dogana, Milan], held at Fondazione Badaracco in Milan. Archive lent by the *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano to the Elvira Badaracco Foundation as a research centre devoted to the study and conservation of the women’s movement in Italy. It comprises materials from the foundation in 1975 to 1997 and is constituted by 20 meters of documents. Having provided its entire name, in all following references I will indicate this source as “AL”. Fondazione Elvira Badaracco will be referred to as “FB”.
- Archive of Luisa Muraro [Archivio personale di Luisa Muraro], held at Fondazione Badaracco in Milan (1976-2004; 58

envelopes). Having provided its entire name, in all following references I will indicate this source as “ALM”.

- Archive of Feminism [Archivio del Femminismo], held at Fondazione Badaracco in Milan (1966-1976; 9 meters). Having provided its entire name, in all following references I will indicate this source as “AF”.
- Archive of Manifests [Archivio Manifesti], held at Fondazione Badaracco in Milan. (1970-1990; 300 pieces). Having provided its entire name, in all following references I will indicate this source as “AM”.
- Libreria delle Donne Archive [Archivio della *Libreria delle Donne*], held at *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan (the material from the organisation held on its premises dating from 1991 up to the present). Having provided its entire name, in all following references I will indicate this source as “ALD”.

In the text I will refer to the source by quoting the name of the archive, title of the document, title of the archival series and archival position (archival position is composed of Section, File, and Envelope). I reported the information on the material that was cited for writing the text (cf. Appendix 1.) and I also provide the list of documents and images at the beginning of the dissertation, in “List of figures” section. Obviously, the actual material I consulted includes many more items. The English translation of the Italian documents, books, texts is mine, in the absence of an English edition and when not otherwise specified. The types of documents collected and analysed are, by theme:

- journal articles;
- published works (magazines, books, scholarly essays, website articles);

- 'grey' material: leaflets, manifestos, cards, invites, etc.;
- administrative documents;
- internal documents (i.e. texts or organising diaries or letters written by and for *Libreria* members on the organisation);
- correspondence (selected correspondence by members of the *Libreria* with other subjects);
- iconographic material (photographs, playbills).

All of the above material was sorted into three categories: materials by the *Libreria*, materials on the *Libreria* and materials that the *Libreria* archived. This is an important passage in that, during my fieldwork, I realised that the bookstore had since its inception maintained an archive in which it conserved both materials on the organisation and materials on other feminist groups or bookstores. This fact is visible in the structure of the archive itself. The *Libreria delle Donne* archive on which I relied most heavily is divided up as reported in table 1, section 1, “Libreria delle Donne”, contains documents directly relatable to the *Libreria delle Donne*, while the other sections represent the activity that the organisation itself carried out as a documentation centre, collecting materials from Italian (section 2) and international (section 3) groups, and organising published material that is significant in relation to the history of the *Libreria* and of the Italian feminist movement more generally (section 4).

TAB. 1 - Structure of the Libreria delle Donne Archive at Fondazione
Badaracco, Milan
Fondazione Badaracco website

<p>1. Libreria delle Donne</p> <p>1.1 Documents on <i>Libreria</i> political activities</p> <p>1.2 Press reviews and dossiers</p> <p>1.3 Manifestos</p> <p>1.4 Thesis dissertations</p> <p>1.5 Administration</p> <p>1.6 Bibliographical catalogue</p> <p>1.7 Inventories</p>
<p>2. Italian groups and organisations</p> <p>2.1 Documents on political activities organised by the <i>Libreria</i></p> <p>2.2 Documents on political activities</p> <p>2.3 Manifestos</p>
<p>3. International groups and organisations</p> <p>3.1 Documents on political activities organised by the <i>Libreria</i></p> <p>3.2 Documents on political activities</p> <p>3.3 Manifestos</p>
<p>4. Magazines</p> <p>4.1 Italian magazines</p> <p>4.2 International magazines</p>

Rowlinson et al. (2014) notes that organisational archives are not only still poorly used as a method of data collection in Organisation Studies, but they are also treated as unquestioned evidence. In my study, I relied on documents and evidences from the bookstore archives while also considering the archival practice in itself as a valuable source of evidence to be examined as a trace of the process of organising.

In fact, the period I spent at the archive served firstly as a way of studying documents that allowed me to construct a basic history of organising at the *Libreria*. Together with bibliographic work, this historical outline was aimed at contextualising the historical emergence of the bookstore and at genealogically reconstructing the foundations of Italian Feminism of Difference and served as a first level on which to ground my analysis. Secondly, I interrogated the written accounts with an eye for actions, decisions, and reflections that concerned the process of creating the bookstore and looked at them as a first set of narrations and textual sources to analyse as sense-making processes in the work of generating the *Libreria*. This was very important, as some of these narrations were conceived as public (for example, leaflets describing the meaning of the bookstore project to possible members or customers) whereas others, such as minutes of meetings in which the collective debated the purpose of some activities, etc., were internal documents. Lastly, documents served also another purpose. These texts, inscriptions of the history and meaning of organising at *Libreria*, came to play an active role in my interviewing practice in that I went on to show some key documents to my interlocutors. I selected some key texts and I brought them with me during the interviews, either as scanned and then printed documents or as digital accounts, and showed them to interviewees. This act solicited either a spontaneous narrative account that I followed up on by asking for more retrospective comments (on the content of the document, about the process leading to its editing, etc.) or emotional reactions, and in some cases, it even prompted action on the part of interviewees. The texts I

employed in this way ranged from invoices to unpublished, old and forgotten documents that I retrieved from the archive.

For instance, I located a document that constitutes an interesting self-reflexive narration carried out by the *Libreria* specifically on its organising, written eight years after its foundation. I found the text particularly relevant as it is one of the very few in which members talk explicitly about organising at *Libreria* (they usually talked about political aims, implications for feminist theory, etc., it was up to me to decode and translate most of the texts as accounts of the arena of organising). *Libreria* itself is mostly known and referred to as a political and theoretical subject. In contrast, I believe it was exactly the dimension of organising in which the politics of the bookstore were unfolding. In line with this observation, I realised that I have termed the Libreria delle Donne Archive an ‘organisational archive’ while the literal translation of its official name is instead “political archive of the Women’s Bookstore”. I consider this yet another trace of the bookstore’s self-understanding as first and foremost a political subject.

The set-up of the archive itself can be seen as a materialisation of the primacy of the political dimension over the practical one in the reception of *Libreria* history. When studying the archive, I went through sections 1.1 to 1.4 (cf. table 1) and then wished to access section 1.5, containing administrative documents (invoices, accounting-related materials, correspondence). Searching by myself, I was not able to find these materials. “Nobody has ever asked to see administrative material!”, I was told by the woman in charge of the archive, who then proceeded to show me the different location where these kinds of documents were conserved, a smaller, cellar-like space accessible through a different entrance than the main archive.¹⁶ Every time I needed to take one of folders from this section I had to ask the archivist,

¹⁶ Laura Milani, whom I interviewed for this dissertation and whom I thank for her insights, reflections and help in navigating *Libreria* political history and archive.

exit the main space, go to the cellar-like space, climb several stacks of other documents to get a hold of my precious binder with invoices, go back to the main location, study it, complete the study and then repeat this set of actions to put the binder back in its place and select another one.

While the invoices and balance sheets might have been kept in a separate location due to space constraints or other merely logistical considerations, I read this spatial organising decision as a meaningful one. Apparently, nobody ever asked to see these documents, therefore, they were held in a different place: while political and theoretical documents are in the main building, part of the ‘proper’ archive, administrative documents are in a secondary, less-accessible location. The archive itself has a meaning-making organising practice. This is probably not an instance of misjudgement on the part of the devoted archivists; unquestionably, it is a very material inscription of a hierarchy of meanings into organising practices. At any rate, I retrieved this precious document from the section of correspondence listed among administrative documents. Why is that so? Is it because the document is devoted entirely to organising?

This text, unpublished and forgotten by the collective members themselves, is central to my analysis, which is why I decided to present it in its entirety in chapter 8. Once I had completed the process of collecting materials I saw that it constituted a seminal account, an inscription in which the momentary existence of the organisation becomes visible (Czarniawska 2004b), in which the *Libreria*’s ‘action net’ took on perceptible form (Lindberg and Czarniawska 2006). The use of this text (dating to 1984) in interviews reactivated it as *boundary object* (Lindberg and Walter 2013) which, as members read their old descriptions of the organisation, produced other narrations. Presenting it to some of the members of the *Libreria* activated memories and emotional accounts. It also activated a chain of actions: one interviewee made a phone call during our meeting to tell to another woman about how I had found this document and that they should search for it,

search on my behalf to see if it had been published or not because it was really beautiful, etc.

My own process of either discovering documents or reading passages of a history I care about, that of the Italian feminist movement, spending time with the materiality of a certain handwriting, looking at drawings on the side of notebooks testifying to the mundane and daily unfolding of a meeting that only in retrospect we regard as historically crucial, also elicited emotions in me.

For example, the moment I discovered the above-mentioned document was an emotional passage for me even before it was such for my interlocutors. Feelings and emotions are understood as valid knowledge sources in organisational research processes as well (Gherardi et al. 2007; Gagliardi 2007; cf. also Fineman 2006 for a review of the conceptualisation of emotions in Organisation Studies) in that they grant value, in keeping with a practice-based understanding of organising and organisational learning, to corporeal and sense-based knowledge (Strati 2007); at the same time, embodiment is understood as a significant dimension in research processes, settings, and writings (Thanem and Knights 2012; Thanem 2016). Torkild Thanem and David Knights's (2012) work is, moreover, a beautiful example of what it means to convey the meaning of their arguing (the content of their argument – as if we could distinguish between content and form) by practicing it. They write in a way I find reminiscent of the use in writing of the practice of *partire da sé* and Carla Lonzi's writing method, writing whose language enacts the very themes it touches.¹⁷

The importance of feeling in knowing also entails the question of empathy, a central theme in feminist research practices that implies

¹⁷ This comparison is not made on a historical basis, nor I am claiming that they have been influenced by Lonzi. The authors probably do not know her, but they clearly and explicitly (via their text references) know feminist theory and theorists. The comparison serves only to introduce the reader to the methodology of this Italian thinker and to make visible how she works.

understanding researchers as embodied rather than abstracted subjects, intersubjectively connected with others (Hemmings 2011). Empathy can play a role in different stages of the research process, not only for example in interviews where immersive listening to the interviewed story is important (Anderson and Jack 1991) or even as sites for relationship-building among interviewer and interviewee (Oakley 1981) but also in document analysis, as Marika Cifor and Anne J. Gilliland argue (Cifor and Gilliland 2016; Cifor 2016). They stress that emotions, and bodies have a role to play in archival labour – with particular reference to history and the memory of delicate political issues – at different stages and for different subjects: the producer of records, whose affect is inscribed into the document, the subjects of records, users, and, of course, the archivist whose work is framed as care-giving and is embedded in a web of “affective responsibilities” towards the various stakeholders in the archival process (Caswell and Cifor 2016).¹⁸

¹⁸ The two authors propose a shift in conceptualising archival practice from what they call a “rights-based model” to a “radical empathy” model. Some of their key, guiding questions, include: “How would the archival conversation change if we shifted from a rights-based model toward a feminist ethics of care? What if we began to see archivists not only as guardians of the authenticity of the records in their collections, but also as centerpieces in an ever-changing web of responsibility through which they are connected to the records’ creators, the records’ subjects, the records’ users, and larger communities? What happens when we scratch beneath the surface of the veneer of detached professionalism and start to think of record-keepers and archivists less as sentinels of accountability (or accomplices in human rights violations on the other, and less acknowledged, end of the spectrum) and more as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual responsibility? Furthermore, what if each of these four relationships – archivist and record creator, archivist and record subject, archivist and record user, and archivist and community – was marked by radical empathy?” (Caswell and Cifor 2016: 25).

Interviews

I collected a total of 39 interviews (cf. Appendix 2 for a list), all of them recorded and transcribed. Interviews with core members were conducted during the period in which I was consistently present at the bookstore, while the others were conducted in the following months as well. The interviews were conducted in person, with only a few of them carried out via Skype or e-mail with interviewees living abroad. When conducted in person, the vast majority of interviews were held on site, i.e. in the bookstore; only few of them were conducted in places other than the bookstore in order to accommodate interviewees' health issues.

I conducted interviews by engaging in in-depth, long conversations, as the dialogues usually lasted an average of 1.5 hours ("intensive interviewing", Charmaz 2006: 25). I solicited narrative accounts on the following topics:

- the story of the interviewee's personal involvement with the bookstore;
- a description of her role in the bookstore and of the activities she carried out;
- a practical account of daily practices in bookstore organising;
- an open question about the meaning of the bookstore for the interviewee.

I had some topics that I wanted to touch on but I also wanted to leave the relational setting of the interview open to other possibilities. Therefore, the interviews were usually very long and included exchanges on other topics. Moreover, my last question was usually: "is there something that I did not say that I should have asked you?", a

question I asked to open up possibilities of dialogue and indeterminacy.

I also solicited accounts from non-members of the *Libreria*, for example scholars, entrepreneurs, artists, and other professionals who had come into contact with the *Libreria*. In this case the interviews were aimed at identifying the traces of *Libreria* organising and theorising in contemporary practices.

Interviews are far from simple instruments for opening a window onto finding either the truth about the interviewee's life or the life of the organisation; rather, they are complex social phenomena (Alvesson 2003) that can be seen as sites for recorded interaction, observation and narrative production (Czarniawska 2004a). The moments before, during and after the interviews were occasions for conscious observation of the space setting and use, of the daily unfolding of the work. For example, it was during interviews that I realised how the bookstore space facilitates relation among members and among different types of activities (I treat this topic in chapter 9). Some other interviews constituted sites of not only narrative retelling but also narrative production as works-in-progress creating links between the traditional narratives I heard and contemporary justifications of the practices I witnessed. An example of this is the passage of an interview¹⁹ (an episode I will talk about in chapter 8) about the importance of daily, mundane activities at the *Libreria* – a sphere the interviewee refers to as “materiality” – in which, while we were talking, at the other side of the room two women were setting the space for a presentation that was about to happen and she promptly used this as an example of what she was saying, thus giving me her reading of the action. In other occasions I had the chance to observe things that were happening while I was engaged in an interview. While dialoguing, according to the type of interview, about either philosophy,

¹⁹ Interview with Renata Dionigi, 13th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

or the Libreria's history, or feminist practices and so on, at some point Libreria itself, its presence, its liveliness and its materiality entered in the space of the interview and reclaimed attention. Sometimes it was simply through the greetings of the different women entering in the space and doing their things; other times it was the volume of heated political discussions taking place in a corner of the room. Sometimes it was scuffles for a difficult project "That's it. I had enough, I'm not coming to Libreria anymore!" (says P. - who's there since 1975) ending in toasts for the completed endeavour. "To our book! Cheers!" (P. again, with others). I read these "interferences" as irruptions in the space of the intellect of the bodies and their needs. It is not infrequent to attend an interesting dense and possible difficult meeting on philosophy and seeing complex questions punctuated by comments on the dinner menu. Other times the interruptions were directed at my interlocutor:

(Interviews in progress: L and M.)

S. arrives. – Shall I open a prosecco or a red?

L. Red, red.

(Interviews goes on)

S. comes back from the kitchen with the red wine. – Would you like a drop of wine?

M. – No, thanks...

L. (first sip) - So, we went to Librairie des Femmes in Paris...

(Interview goes on)

These "interferences" accompanied not only my interviews in the moment of their making, but also the moment of their transcription from audio to text. It was especially in that situation that I understood

these other voices - besides mine and my direct interlocutor's - as part, meaningful elements for a possible understanding of the *Libreria*. These disturbances, entering in a two-people dialogue aimed at gathering information, revealed the embracing background where other things - wine, transactions, telephone calls, food, mumblings, purchases, fights, laughs, intense dialogues - were flowing; other voices were speaking, others subjects acting. If I want to understand this organising, I thought, I have to pay attention to the unravelling of these interactions between words and their material life.

Observations

I participated in an intermittent way in *Libreria* life beginning in November 2017, going to the *Libreria* as often as possible to hang out and chat with members and to observe different kinds of events, for example:

- I actively participated at the weekly meetings of the *Libreria's* website newsroom (I was participating and contributing with my own articles as early as 2014-15), key moments in which the material to be published on the website is collected, discussed and modified.
- I attended contemporary art exhibition openings, as they were moments in which people gathered in the bookstore to attend a seminar devoted to the artist and the artworks being exhibited, and therefore offered moments of observation, encounter and exchange not only among members but also between members and the public.
- I observed other types of meetings as well, such as conferences, book launches or other meetings in which contemporary issues or women's politics issues were discussed.

I was immersed in *Libreria* life and observed specific activities and relational patterns, but I also devoted a great deal of attention to the use of the organisational space, as a crucial nexus for the material inscription of organisational meaning and a site for embodied experiences and sense-oriented perceptions (Ropo and Höykinpuro 2017), which I listened to and produced narrations of.

The material generated in this phase was:

- Notes on documents: informative material (timelines, events, names, relations) and my own reflections on it.
- Notes on the fieldwork:
 - notes aiming at recording the events, accompanied by notes and comments containing my own impressions;
 - interview notes;
 - field notes generated after the interviews;
 - research diary notes wherein I kept a record of my opinions / reactions / emotions during the research process.

As should be evident by now, I started off with a sense of felt interest in the bookstore. It should be equally clear, however, that this feeling, this emotional attachment to the *Libreria*, was never either stable or always permeated by positive connotations. In reality, I also sometimes felt uncomfortable in the bookstore. Never as if I was in the right place, not even when I was 'just' a writing student. But this is far from being a negative thing. This is partly because it is a place in which I experienced lucid intelligence and a critical sense of inquiring into positions and accounts that is very far from the kind of cosy sisterhood one might imagine when thinking about a feminist space. I also experienced detachment, especially following the third year of the

writing school, in 2017, when I was already a PhD student. Attending the course while already engaged in the PhD was strange: I was a different person. The knowledge I gathered was supposed to serve my desire to write about this place, and instead it made me more keenly aware of its 'un-exceptionality' in terms of history and thought as I delved into its theoretical genealogies. At the same time, I felt guilty because a part of me was uncomfortable in setting the stage for *the big* question: can I interview you? I want to conduct a study on you...

In fact, empirical access was obtained not in formal way, but it was negotiated gradually and from a position of someone already knowing the institution. On the one hand negotiating an access in a 'soft' way, coming from a place of previous involvement or personal interest with the space is the way to approach this kind of political organisation, I believe; and it is a way that is significantly different in respect to other structured and formal organisations. On the other, I had an active role in maintaining a sort of opacity in the process: it was explicit and known that I was studying the organisation of the Bookstore, that I did archival work and of course what the aim and objective of the interviews was; while I believe it was not explicit that my participation to some events was also connected to an exercise in observation. Indeed I never really digested the right way to conceptualise my being in the bookshop as an observer and more or less participant. I had doubts and ethical dilemmas, as I felt unease knowing that I was there also with the aim of observing. This was a constant throughout my fieldwork.

I am also uncomfortable now, as I realise that I made many mistakes, for example in carrying out interviews. Although interviews have been conceptualised as a locus of power or knowledge asymmetry between the interviewer and interviewee (Gluck and Patai 1991), power (Charmaz 2006) or intellectual (Czarniawska 1998) imbalances can also appear to the detriment of the interviewer: I realised that, at times, I was the one in the weaker position, not always able to manage the interview as I wanted.

All of the above drove me to keep ‘research diary notes’ (cf. for example Fine and Buzzanell 2000, for their use of diary notes regarding their experience as academic administrators as methodology in their paper on feminist leadership) in which I wrote the story of the research process. I did not conduct an auto-ethnography, as I myself am not the object of this study (Ellis and Bochner 2000), but I did observe my own being in the situation. These written observations, read some time later, were sites of meaning-generation that taught me something about the site of my inquiry.

3.3.3 Analysis of the material

I already began to conduct analysis during the material collection phase (documents) as, once I had begun to retrieve large amounts of documents, I started to take notes, write down my impressions, make timelines, etc. Similarly, I took notes and wrote down my reflections during the fieldwork as well. According to Kathy Charmaz and Richard G. Mitchell (2001), elements common to the approach known as “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006) include the idea that the research phases from collection to interpretations take place simultaneously, even as the researcher looks for emergent themes from first the steps of data analysis, followed by the inductive construction of abstract categories explaining the social processes which emerge from the data and finally, integration. I approached grounded theory from a constructivist rather than objectivist stance (Charmaz 2000; 2006) and made use of this method as a ‘preparatory stage’ for analysis and not a sense-making device *per se*. In fact, for me the coding process was a way of organising the material generated, of looking at it differently and, at the same time, distancing myself from it. In fact, the recursive process of coding allowed me to delve ‘deeper’ into it while at the same ‘breaking it down’ into pieces, thus constituting a device that helped me see my material in new ways by stepping back from it.

It was very different, in fact, to approach an interview in its entirety (and knowing its author!) rather than looking at massive amounts of somehow impersonal codes in an Excel file. At the beginning, I coded the field material on paper so as to aggregate broad thematic nuclei. Then, I conducted a more analytical coding in Excel. From the coding categories I extracted themes that I wrote and re-wrote on paper, creating schemes and associations recursively as interviews progressed, and then I returned to coding. Some examples of codes are:

- Arrival at the Bookstore
- Competence
- Political conflicts and relations
- Attributes of the Bookstore
- Feelings towards the Bookstore

This phase was very useful in organising the material, but at some point I needed to go back to a bigger, multi-faceted picture. I needed a story to weave, and I found a narrative approach useful and meaningful for making sense of the material. The Hernadi “hermeneutic triad” composed of *explication*, *explanation*, and *exploration* (Hernadi 1987) as explained by Barbara Czarniawska (1997; 2004a) can be used as a device for representing the pattern of reading, although in practice the moments are actually intertwined (Czarniawska 2004a: 78). Explication was carried out through a phase of reading interviews and then writing out summaries and my initial efforts to grasp the meanings of what had been said. In making sense of the text, I was trying to explicate what the people were saying so as to extract the meanings, especially in relation to events that occurred during *Libreria* life, its activities and theoretical production. Explanation was carried out via the two levels of translation I had to impose on the texts: from Italian to English, and from the language of practitioners to a language

understandable in a dissertation. The instances of speech I listened to and interacted with were either feminist jargon that had to be accounted for or refined theoretical and political talk. Indeed, 'my' practitioners are highly educated and most of them have a higher intellectual and political standing than I do, as can happen in the field (Czarniawska 1998). Translation also played a role in accounting for unpublished documents, books or essays of Italian feminist theory. Translating them (either directly, for example in the case of passages or quotes, or indirectly, in the sense that I had to write in English basing my reasoning on Italian texts) was an extremely difficult exercise, for obvious reasons. However, amidst the conceptual difficulties, something interesting happened in the process of translating from mother to foreign tongue. I found myself required in some way to review my understanding of these theories, re-evaluate why I found them interesting, and dissect them so that I could say something meaningful in a language that challenged me to be more precise and simple. At some moments I almost felt that I was translating myself.²⁰

More practically, concerning the translation from jargon and insider references to feminist theory, I found it useful to construct a very simple scheme focused on words or expressions that appeared multiple times in my interviews.

²⁰ The double-sided process of estrangement and re-found vicinity gained in the translation process in writing up a doctoral dissertation is the incipit of an essay on Italian feminism by Stefania Ferrando, *Le parole ritrovate*, in *Diotima* 13 (2015) [<http://www.diotimafilosofe.it/larivista/parole-ritrovate/> – last accessed 11-01-2019]. Stefania is an Italian philosopher working in French academia; I interviewed her as part of the sets of interviews to contemporary scholars influenced by *Libreria delle Donne* thought.

This scheme categorises three types of expressions:

- 1) Expressions widely circulating in the *Libreria* either in interviews or in conversations I heard. The translation here serves as contextualisation within the history of the organisation.
- 2) Common daily expressions, referring to insider knowledge/feminist jargon referencing feminist texts.
- 3) Recurrent and widely used words or expressions that are borrowed from the theories produced by *Libreria* members.

I broke these down into: a first description, context of use (in the organisation), origin (a genealogy of the word, especially for type 3). The scheme was originally formulated in Italian, so it then underwent a second translation process as indicated in the second column.

TAB. 2 - Example of the explication scheme

Words / Expressions	English Translation	Description	Context and Origin of use
Le fondatrici Le storiche	The founders The historical members	The women that founded the Bookstore in 1975.	Referral to the early years of feminism, referral to the inception and political motivations that are at the foundations of the bookstore. Also used in contrast to the category “the youngsters”, referring to women entering as members of the Bookstore in the Nineties.
Il <i>Non credere</i>	The <i>Non credere</i>	Expression used to quickly refer to the seminal book <i>Non credere di avere dei diritti</i> (1987), collectively written by the Bookstore collective about their own history.	Referred to as either an activity (a crucial moment of collective work) or as a reference in theories. Also used as an authoritative source regarding how the history of the <i>Libreria</i> went, a sort of law book (cf. Raviola and Nörbäck 2013) of canonical history.

Femminismo delle Origini Le Origini	Feminism of the Origins The Origins	Second Wave, Radical Feminism.	Used to refer to Feminism of Difference's initial stance, to the period of the small <i>autocoscienza</i> groups, to Carla Lonzi.
Le madri Le madri simboliche Genealogie	Mothers Symbolic mothers Genealogies	Makes reference to experiences, words, practices, texts carried out/written by great women of the past to whom to turn as a reference point.	Used to talk about seminal writers, about projects concerning the life of <i>Libreria</i> , for example the writing of the <i>Yellow Catalogue</i> on seminal women writers. It refers to the idea of "genealogy" as a symbolic structure put in place by feminist research in the first phase, wherein it was important to reconstruct a history and a reference to actions and texts by other women. Primary reference of the group is Luisa Muraro's book <i>The Symbolic Order of the Mother</i> (2006) [1991], wherein the author engages with Lacan's concept of "symbolic order" and proposes the constitution of a symbolic order of the mother.

Autorità circolante	Diffused authority	When there is a sense of entrustment in a group of women, each one putting her trust onto the others, accompanied by respect, celebration and learning from that woman. Also refers to the act of listening to a woman who is speaking.	Refers to context in which it was found to exist or to contexts in which it was lacking. Present in narrative accounts of <i>Libreria</i> history. Builds on the reflection of <i>Libreria delle Donne</i> on the importance of recognising women's differences and imbalances in skills and power, and to avoid the risk of homogenising women within the ideal of sisterhood. Ideas that appear in different texts by <i>Libreria</i> and were rendered systematic in the work of Luisa Muraro, <i>Autorità</i> (2013).
Partire da sé	Departing from oneself	Practice in which the person who is speaking / writing / acting talks not in abstract terms without explicit positioning, but rather talks with calculated simplicity and makes reference to her own experience as a starting point for reasoning.	It was given formalised expression in the volume <i>La sapienza del partire da sé</i> by Diotima (1996).

I have tried to intersperse the text with traces of my *exploration* practice. Exploration consists in an existential enactment through which the reader brings her life into the text and becomes an author (Czarniawska 2004a: 79). This approach is considered unfit for scientific texts but is used in other traditions, one of which is standpoint feminism. In addition to Barbara Czarniawska's assertion that "all feminist writings are a huge exploration experiment" (Czarniawska 2004a: 72), I would add that the Italian feminist tradition, for example in the *Diotima* research community at the University of Verona (cf. chapter 7) and by virtue of the "departing from oneself" methodology (cf. chapter 5), advocates for a research practice in which the person writing does not disappear behind quotations and references but rather takes responsibility and runs the risk of becoming the author of her own text.

In this dissertation I reported some narrative episodes (Raviola and Nörbäck 2013): both in the form of excerpts from interviews or inserting literary texts on *Libreria* that I presented in non-analytical way (cf. chapter 6 and 5). First, seeing as there was not room in the text to express the richness of the interviews that I conducted and they instead served as material to be interpreted, this was a device to represent the different voices in *Libreria* (on "polyphony" or "variegated speech", see Czarniawska 1999; 1997). Secondly, these texts are intended as moments in which I offer descriptions with the idea of rendering the atmosphere of the *Libreria* as a composite whole of texts, objects, sounds, and bodies. In reporting interviews extracts I did not cut myself out of the story, when possible and meaningful, but I explicated my presence by inserting the inscription of myself into the text. The letter "M." is in fact also inscribed into the pages, signifying my presence in the unfolding of the scene and somehow declaring that what I am producing is nothing but a text. I decided to do this in order to intervene as little as possible in the fabric of the text and to adhere as closely as possible to the context in which the speech occurred.

This use of interview transcription is inspired by the way Carla Lonzi used transcription in her research practice,¹ from *Autoritratto* (1969) to the last book published before her death, *Vai pure. Dialogo con Pietro Consagra* (1980). *Vai pure* (“Now You Can Go”) consists in a transcription of four days of dialogue between Lonzi and her companion, Italian abstract sculptor Pietro Consagra (1920-2005), resulting in their separation.² *Vai pure*, a very dense text in terms of themes – Lonzi reflects on the conditions of possibility of a romantic relationship and develops a sophisticated critique of culture and the idea of the independent, autonomous creator – constitutes a mature (it is the last book to be published before her death in 1982) example of Lonzi’s writing as transcription. In this lucid and sober text, the personal presence of both characters appears not as a personalist or narcissistic stance but as an effort to produce a text that is as non-abstract as possible. Lonzi achieves this quality thanks to a particular practice of writing as the transcription of a recording which should not, however, be understood as a naïve idea of representing ‘authentic’ reality without mediation. Lonzi is aware that the simple use of the

¹ For a review of the genealogies behind the use of the recording device in Lonzi’s research practice, contextualised in relation to politically-engaged ethnomusicological research practices on popular culture in 1960s Italy, cf. Iamurri 2001, Ventrella 2015, and also Zapperi 2017, who suggests another possible reference underlying Lonzi’s practice, that of the automatic writing processes of the Surrealist tradition. Recording was a practice that invested not only Lonzi’s production but her life as well, as she recorded dialogues, meetings and even telephone calls, as reported in the biography of her written by her sister Marta Lonzi and Anna Jaquinta (1985), both fellow members of the *Rivolta* collective.

² In 1981, one year after the book was published, Lonzi told an Italian newspaper, *Quotidiano Donna*: “When I said ‘Vai pure’ I turned off the recording device. I went to the door and said goodbye. He opened the elevator door and left. There wasn’t one more word than the one pronounced in the dialogue” (Carla Lonzi, *Con il problema dell’uomo alle spalle*, «Quotidiano Donna», 15 May 1981).

recording device does not guarantee either authenticity, understood as direct ‘capture’, or neutrality, understood as an un-mediated process that faithfully renders what is happening. On the contrary, Lonzi uses the recorder as a technical mediator that facilitates a specific form of writing in its own right, one that results in a text into which the speaking bodies and their relations are inscribed. The use of the recording transcription can be read as an attempt to account for and represent, in a metonymical way (in line with Luisa Muraro’s analysis of the political implications of metonymical writing 1998 [1981]), the relational and material context in which speech is generated, as Linda Bertelli and I have argued in a co-authored research (Bertelli and Equi Pierazzini 2017). This recursive collision between spoken and written words and between bodies and texts can be seen in a passage of *Vai pure* – chosen from among many other such examples.

Rome, 27 April 1980 – Carla’s home³

P. Sunday morning.

C. Let’s go on...

P. Carla says “Shall we record?”. And I say “If you provoke me, we can talk”. And she says “So?”. So she took out the recorder. We don’t know what to say... Ah, yes, we know what to say... When our being together is not problematic, we don’t have anything to say, isn’t it?

Another passage:

Rome, 9 May 1980 – Carla’s home⁴

³ Lonzi 1980: 35

P. I was telling you about my relationship with the art object...

This text is composed in such a way as to provide traces, as inscribed via “P.” and “C.”, or expression such “Carla says...”, of the bodily presence of the speaking bodies that are referenced in the discussion, that are referred to as a condition existing ‘before’ the textual representation. In other passages, the presence of the bodies is evoked by devices (for example, strings of asterisks) indicating their absence.⁵

C. So, back to what we were saying.

P. Let’s take a break.

(***)

Finally, another example of the recursive relationship between experience and representation is effectively captured by the performative quality of the *Vai pure* text. “Now you can go” is, in fact, simultaneously the last spoken word between the two, the last printed word in the book, its title, and the actual effect of the conversation.

3.4 Chapter summary

I organised my study by “zooming in” and “zooming out” Nicolini (2009; 2012), conceptualising this as a research and representation device consistent with the idea of “theory-method package”. This empirical program, explicitly formulated to study and represent practices, is composed of three phases: “zooming in on the

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

accomplishments of practice; zooming out to discern their relationships in space and time; and using the above devices to produce diffracting machinations that enrich our understanding through thick textual renditions of mundane practices” (Nicolini 2012: 219).

As a practice entailing a recursive focus on data and the relationship between data and theory, I consider this to be a good fit with my approach in this study. The main movements of my research developed as follows.

Zooming in

Zoom in (cf. table 3) entails the observation – via different methodologies – of practices as actual material and discursive accomplishments, the process through which practices are legitimated and made to last in time, what implications they have for the actors’ bodies, and what are the patterns of participation, knowledge generation and learning, but also what the relationship is with non-members of the practice. I accounted for this dimension specifically in the chapters devoted to the field study (6 to 8). In my study (notably chapter 7, where I read the activities connected to the main Bookstore publications and their meaning), I considered the discursive elements and practical activities carried out by the actors in the organisation (a focus on *Sayings and doings*). I did so by drawing on members’ narrative accounts (interviews, dialogues), texts (documents, website, books), themes and discourses (captured via observation and participation), practical knowledge, daily routines and actions. As part of a general interest in space and its objects (focus on *Tools, artefacts, and mediation work*), I focused on material arrangements in the architectural design of the bookstore and the material devices and equipment used in daily routines as well as on the relationship of bodies in space – both collective members and bookstore customers – in order to understand the material and symbolic landscape in which practice is carried out (*Bodily choreography* focus). This was particularly evident in chapter 9, for example, where I narrate the spatial design of the store after it was

moved from its traditional headquarters. I devoted particular attention to the definition of roles and responsibilities within a context of voluntary, political work and to what practices constituted and discursively justified this arrangement, and to understanding the telic and care dimension of these practices (focus on *Practical concerns*). I also observed the process through which feminist heritage was transmitted and new participants socialised via discourses and practices as well as tools and instruments. For example, I devoted particular attention to the archival constitution process (cf. chapp. 6 and 8) read as a material inscription of the arena of maintaining the organisation (*Processes of legitimation and stabilisation*).

Table 3 presents the focuses and issues of the *zoom in* phase according to Nicolini (2012). I present it here as example of the analytical focus and questions that guided my research (they are not sections to which each part of my research strictly refers.)

TAB. 3 - Example of Zoom in
Adapted from table “A palette for zooming in”, in Nicolini 2012: 220

FOCUS OF THE ZOOM IN PHASE	SELECTED QUESTIONS
SAYINGS AND DOINGS	What are people saying and doing? Through which moves, strategies, methods and discursive practical devices do practitioners accomplish their work?
INTERACTIONAL ORDER	What sort of interactional order is performed by this specific practice? How does this differ from similar practices performed elsewhere?
TIMING AND TEMPO	How are the sayings and actions temporarily organised?
BODILY CHOREOGRAPHY	What is the material and symbolic landscape in which the practice is carried out? How is practice accomplished through the body? How are bodies configured by the practice?

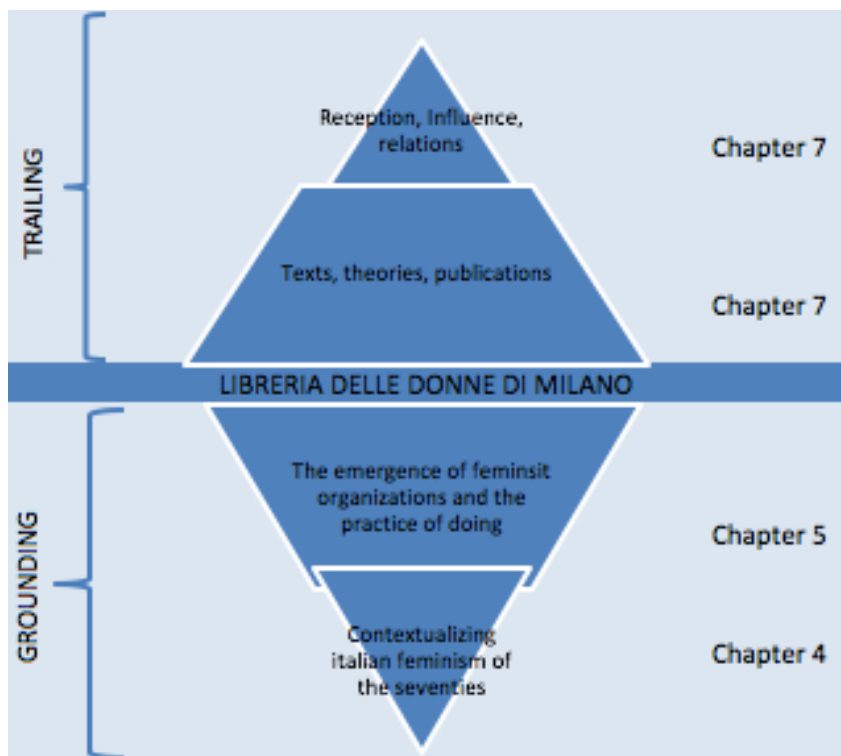
TOOLS, ARTEFACTS, AND MEDIATION WORK	What artefacts are used in the practice? How are the artefacts used in practice? What visible and invisible work do they perform? In which way do they contribute to giving sense to the practice itself? What is the intermediation work they perform?
PRACTICAL CONCERNS	What are the mundane practical concerns that ostensibly orient the daily work of the practitioners? What matters to them? What do they see as their main object of activity?
TENSION BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND NORMATIVITY	How are mundane breakdowns addressed? What are the main ways in which practitioners make themselves accountable in practice? Where and how are the disputes between right and wrong played out? Where are the main tensions?
PROCESS OF LEGITIMATION AND STABILISATION	How are novices socialised? What are they told? What stories are used in this process? How is the difference between insiders and outsiders brought to bear? How are practices made durable? What doings, sayings, and artifacts are employed for the purpose?

Zooming out

Zoom out is a phase in which the researcher focuses on what lies beyond and before the local accomplishment of practice. I employed two movements: *trailing* and *grounding*. I followed the influence and relational net created by the Bookstore as well as their own texts (publications, leaflets, manifestos, website, and theories – cf. chapter 7) as mediators which cause the practices of the *Libreria* to travel (Nicolini 2012: 232). At the same time, I grounded my understanding of these practices by looking at the conditions that made them possible via a historical reconstruction of the wider socio-cultural and historical *milieu* in which Second Wave Italian Feminism developed (chap. 4). I did so by offering a possible understanding of the historical antecedents grounding the ‘practice of doing’ theorisation (chap. 5), and narrating the process through which the Bookstore was founded (chap. 6). The following image represents the trailing and grounding in my research process, and the chapters that mainly (but not exclusively) address the issues mentioned.

I used the ‘zooming in and out’ scheme to represent the stages of my research process, and practice of writing it, elements which have been the focus of this chapter. In section 3.1 I narrated the story of my involvement with the field, and I used this section to present the feminist epistemological framework of my doing research. Section 3.2 narrowed the focus to the organisational research methods I employed, highlighting the three main features of this study: its practice-oriented nature, its historical orientation and the centrality it grants to writing and narrative dimension. In conclusion, section 3.3 presented the practical stages of research from material generation to analysis during fieldwork.

IMG. 1 - Zoom out as trailing and grounding
My elaboration from Nicolini (2012)



PART II

Contextualising the emergence of an organisation

Part II offers to the reader a reconstruction of the context of emergence in which the organisation under scrutiny and its main practices developed.

Chapter 4 narrates a synthetic history of the early phases of the feminist movement in Italy in the late sixties and seventies, thus offering a reference timeline and contextual boundary to appraise the emergence of feminist organisation in the second half of the seventies.

Chapter 5 is devoted to explain the meaning of practices in Italian feminist tradition and unravels in presenting the '*practice of doing*' and its implication in the organising sphere.

Chapter 6 reconstructs the very early stages of conceptualisation and emergence of Milan Women's Bookstore.

Chapter 4

Brief history of the origin of Italian feminist movement

In this chapter I contextualise the emergence of the feminist movement in Italy in the seventies and present some key themes in its development. I present the context in which the movement arose and then outline the first type of feminist organising characterising this movement, namely small groups. I focus on the very early phase of the movement (1966-70) during which the groups that are considered pioneers formed, and I focus on the Milanese groups that had a key role in developing core feminist practices (Bracke 2014a: 68). The founders of some of the first groups (DEMAU and *Cerchio Spezzato*) included women who went on to act as founders and members of the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano*, an organisation which is thus rooted in the earliest phase of feminism in Italy. This overview also allows me to illustrate some key points of the debate within the movement (such as the tension between liberation and emancipation and the emerging concept of “sexual difference”), and to mention the influence exerted by the 1968 movement and women’s liberation movement in the USA. Finally, I devote a sub-chapter to the collective *Rivolta Femminile* and their autonomous publishing house.

I made this choice in part because of the importance of the group’s funding figure, Carla Lonzi, in Italian feminism. Lonzi and her group were among the very first to initiate *autocoscienza*, the Italian translation for the “consciousness raising” practiced by American feminism, a practice that was central in *Rivolta Femminile* history. Secondly, the case of the *Rivolta Femminile* publishing house, founded in 1970, allows me to highlight some points regarding some feminist groups’ relationship with the cultural sphere, a theme that proves equally important when dealing with the *Libreria delle Donne*.

Overall, this chapter should be useful in providing a guiding chronology of the history in which my case study is embedded and analytically grounding some key issues – such as the choice of separatism, the practice of consciousness raising, the critique of emancipation and the formulation of the concept of difference – which are useful for understanding early feminism in Italy and explaining the emerging differences among feminist political positions. I tell a part of the history of Italian feminism via the narration of its groups up to the second half of the Seventies, at which point different forms of organising started to emerge and the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* story begins. This chapter, therefore, is about the early history of *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* and its relationship with the first groups to arise at the dawn of the feminist movement in Italy.

4.1 Contextualising the emergence of the Italian feminist movement

The Italian Feminist Movement, “emerging in the late 1960s in the form of small groups of women wishing to articulate, among themselves in the first instance, their desire for new, freer ways of being a woman, the ‘New Feminism’, as this phenomenon was referred to, rapidly developed into a large, highly visible movement” (Bracke 2014a: 1). The socio-cultural context in which this movement arose was a moment of sweeping transformation for Italy, a post-war country characterised by an expanding economy (the so-called “economic miracle”, 1958-63), supported by advancement in the industrial sector and new, emerging economic and political formations.¹ The overall process of

¹ In this period, Italy entered into international markets and FIAT, along with other successful firms such as Candy that adopted the Fordist-Taylorist model of production in the Sixties, enjoyed booming success. The post-war economy played a role in influencing national growth. In 1951, the *Comunità Europea del*

modernisation involved socio-cultural changes as well. Against the backdrop of changes in consumption and lifestyle, newly founded women's magazines (for example *Amica*, *Grazia*, *Annabella*) and television played a prominent role in shaping an imaginary of the country's modernisation and emancipated women.² Overall, modernisation processes had two-fold implications, on one hand fostering greater opportunities for women, changing and opening up lifestyles;³ on the other, female employment remained scarcer and more

Carbone e dell'Acciaio was founded; in 1957 the Rome Treaties were signed, marking the birth of the European Economic Community, and in the same year the *Comunità Europea Energia Atomica* was founded.

² Since 1954, with the rise of TV shows, new models of behaviour, lifestyles, and consumption were introduced and represented. Indeed, television became increasingly common, with 1 million RAI subscribers in 1958 (Lussana 2012: 26). In his text, Guido Giachetti (2005) relies heavily on popular imaginaries fostered by music, fashion and television, on one side to illustrate the influence of the post-war era and of the early Sixties on the rebellious moment represented by feminism, and on the other to reflect on the transformation of post-war Italy and its contradictions. Female emancipation in the Sixties was also represented by new aesthetic styles (symbolised by shorter skirts, which Giachetti defines as more an indicator than a garment, or the use of makeup) and lifestyles. The mismatch between these behavioural changes and the social and institutional situation triggered a number of tensions.

³ At the end of the Fifties the Merlin Law (law 20 February 1958 n. 75) abolished brothels and other rules aimed at fighting the exploitation of prostitution. The debate around this law contributed to shedding light on the moralism and tenets of the patriarchal family that were still deeply entrenched in post-war Italy. Until 1963 (law 9 January 1963 n. 7, *Divieto di Licenziamento delle lavoratrici per causa di matrimonio*, during the third Fanfani government) an employer was allowed fire an employee once she got married. In the same year Law 9 February 1963 n. 66, *Ammissione della donna ai pubblici uffici e alle professioni* was approved. Finally, in March 1963 a law was passed instituting a pension fund for housewives (law 5 March 1963 n. 389). In 1965 an *iter parlamentare* began (initiated by Loris Fortuna with legislative proposal "Casi di scioglimento del

precarious than men's work (Bracke 2014a; Lussana 2012). Moreover, problematic and idealised visions of femininity were still actively circulating in the public discourse. As Yasmine Ergas wrote: "By the second half of the 1960s, a substantial role conflict characterised the condition of young women, in such a way that their expectations and behaviour were polarised between 'emancipation' (understood as access to social parity) and family-centered feminine models" (Ergas 1985: 259). This entailed the idea of "the dedicated housewife, the loving mother and the efficient double-burden carrier", according to which gender roles connected to family and motherhood were still highly present and strong (Bracke 2014a: 11). In the US, it was precisely this "feminist mystique" that Betty Friedan, one of the 1966 founders of the US's first feminist organisation, NOW (National Organisation for Women), took as the target of critique in her seminal book by the same title.⁴

It was in this scenario that New Feminism emerged. The term "New Feminism" is employed to distinguish the movement arising in the late Sixties and late Seventies from the feminism of the second half of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century, making it part of the transnational movement commonly referred to as "Second Wave Feminism". While First Wave Feminism fought for equity among men and women in the sphere of civic and political rights (i.e. the fight for women's suffrage), Second Wave Feminism moved this struggle forward by focusing on sexuality as the sphere in which the politics of power is played out and developing a critical understanding of women's and men's social roles. A third wave of feminism, beginning in the late Eighties, has sought to enrich feminist

matrimonio") that was eventually concluded in 1970 with the approval of the divorce law (cf. Lussana 2012: 22-8, 49).

⁴ *The Feminine Mystique* was published in Italy in 1964 by Adriano Olivetti's Edizioni di Comunità. *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (Gallimard, 1949) appeared in Italy in 1961 (Il Saggiatore). Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, published in 1969, appeared in Italy in 1971, put out by Rizzoli.

debate with an intersectional lens on the gendered analysis of society, taking race, class and sexual orientation into consideration in the formation of inequalities and identities (Cavarero and Restaino 2002; Restaino 2002; Laughlin and Castledine 2011; Springer 2005). Secondly, Third Wave Feminism also signals the gradual integration of feminist debate into scholarship. As far as the present moment is concerned, it has been argued that today's feminist debate has fallen into the realm of "post-feminism" (Angela McRobbie 2004; Gill 2007a, 2007b), a term used to indicate both the taken-for-granted status of feminist ideas in contemporary society (i.e. the fact that it is perceived as out of date) and the process of de-politicisation and normalisation of feminist critical impulses via the absorption of feminist themes into popular culture.

Before presenting a possible periodisation for the Italian movement, I would like to reflect on the broader periodisation of feminism as a global movement. In fact, the master metaphor representing and constructing an understanding of the historical development of feminism is well established, yet it has been the object of recent debate and critique in feminist scholarship (Bracke 2014a). The main critique of this metaphor is that it suggests a narration of successive rupture rather than underlining the points of continuity in women's political action. "The metaphor of the waves is problematic in that it sees only rupture and obliterated gradual transformations as they occurred during the phase 'in between' first-wave and second-wave feminism, in the 1920s to the 1960s" (Bracke 2014a: 5). It is interesting to note that, in this context, empirical case studies have been considered useful tools for overcoming the tide-based distinction between activity and inactivity on a practical level: feminist organisations represent a terrain that allows us to investigate the history of feminist political engagement throughout different generations and ideologies and during moments which have traditionally been considered backlash (Laughlin and Castledine 2011). A second critique is that not only was women's political action being enacted "in between" waves, but that there was actually a debate on

women's freedom and the articulation of a discourse on equality between the sexes even before the "first wave", thus indicating continuity in women's political engagement and the grounds for a 'formalised' feminist movement to arise.⁵ Finally, postcolonial feminism has contributed to critiques of the wave periodisation as "the image of the wave both forms part of a foundation myth and presents the idea of a historical progression based on the experience of white women in North America and Europe" (Bracke 2014a: 9), thus obscuring other traditions of women's resistance such as African American women's activism, lesbian activism and other identity-based and social justice movements (Springer 2005; Hogan 2016).⁶

⁵ For example, scholars such as Joan Kelly (1982) and Maria Milagros Rivera Garretas (1998) argue that the debates and themes developed during the period of the *Querelle des femmes* in Europe can be framed as early feminist thinking. The *Querelle des femmes* is an expression used to refer to the long and heterogeneous debate – played out through literary works and pamphlets – between men and women regarding women's literary capabilities and social roles, articulated between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries and epitomised and initiated by Christine de Pisan (1364-1430).

Other early feminist work include that by Marie de Jars de Gournay (1565-1645) and Gabrielle de Suchon (1631-1703) and, of course, the 'mothers' of feminism Olympe de Gouges (1748-1797) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), active when the *Querelle* ended as a debate, giving way to a fully feminist political project.

⁶ For example, Kimberly Springer notes that the resistance of enslaved African American women can be conceptualised as early feminist action. "Active resistance to male supremacy in the form of rape, forced reproduction, and the commodification of black women's bodies demonstrated feminist resistance to this specifically female-gendered oppression. In addition, African American women's activism alongside white women's, in the abolition and anti-lynching movements, predates that of the suffrage movement, thus making the case for feminist activism in the United States preceding traditional first wave definitions" (Springer 2005: 8).

These critiques are also relevant for Italy where it is common to use the term “New Feminism”, a word that entails a sense of unproblematised newness, coupled with a historical narration that depicts the movement as rising suddenly and subsequently declining (Bracke 2014a). Historian Maud Anne Bracke proposes that the feminist movement be embedded in the political history of Italy, analysing the moments and antecedents of its emergence in the late Sixties and questioning its legacies in the contemporary world. This is in line with historian Paola Di Cori’s (Di Cori 2012) critique of the notion that the Eighties witnessed the “end of the movement”. Di Cori, as part of a more complex reflection on the process of historicising feminism, suggests that it would be productive to “overturn” the common perspective according to which the Seventies are the moment of straightforward action and “clarity” in the movement, while the Eighties are the moment of “obscurity” in women’s political action. Rather, it was precisely in the Eighties and Nineties that the complexity and diversity of the feminist modality started to emerge explicitly and “the immense struggle of emancipation and the difficult road to liberation became transparent. It was only the beginning, and not a completed process” (Di Cori 2012: 27-8).

As for Italian feminism specifically, apart from some differences in setting the starting and ending periods that I will address, the common periodisation entails three main phases in the development of the movement. A first phase is characterised by the emergence of the first consciousness raising groups, leading to a greater diffusion of feminist consciousness that peaked in the great rallies of the Seventies, a period in which feminism is considered a widespread movement in Italy, then declining from the late Seventies / beginning of the Eighties onward.

TAB. 4 - Phases in the development of the second wave feminist movement in Italy

PHASE	NAME	PERIOD
1 st phase	INCEPTION. First groups and collectives	Late Sixties-1973
2 nd phase	DIFFUSION. Feminism as a movement	1973-1975/6
3 rd phase	DECLINE. Decline of feminism as a movement	From 1976

While some authors set the beginning of the feminist period to 1965, a date that allows the analysis to take into consideration the antecedents of the 1968 students' movement and to capture the birth of the first feminist collective, DEMAU, founded in Milan between December of 1965 and January 1966 (Lussana 2012), the common periodisation sets the beginning of feminism at 1970, the founding date of *Rivolta Femminile* and *Anabasi*, groups that firstly employed *autocoscienza* (Passerini 1992). This periodisation captures the beginning of the *autocoscienza* practice being employed in feminist groups; accordingly, DEMAU and similar groups are considered to be proto-feminist (Bracke 2014a: 43)⁷ since their practices and critiques did not

⁷ Bracke, introducing a third type of periodisation, sets the beginning of feminism in Italy in 1968. She makes this choice in order to situate feminism as an actor in the Italian "cycle of contention" (expression introduced by Tarrow 1989), and to indicate its relationship with the "cultures of the 1968" (an

yet coincide with the key practice of *autocoscienza* (Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Bracke 2014a).

The years from 1973 to 1976 are considered an expanding phase in which feminist consciousness was more widespread, participation to the movement was high and its visibility was rising (Giachetti 2005; Paolucci 1987). In the previous years, Italy promulgated some important laws, such as the 1970 divorce law,⁸ and groups started to mobilise around the crucial question of abortion and take on more societal and political issues. After a few years of intense debate and for a series of reasons connected to the unfolding of the socio-political debate between 1976 and 1978 (cf. for example the analysis by De Luna 2009) and developments internal to the movement itself, the movement in its mass form began to decline. The radicalisation of the political struggle culminated in the kidnapping and death of Aldo Moro in 1978 (9 May),⁹ and two weeks later the law on the social protection of

expression introduced by Agosti, Tranfaglia and Passerini 1991, cf. Bracke 2014a: 13).

⁸ The 1970 Law on divorce (1 December 1970 n. 898, *Disciplina dei casi di scioglimento del matrimonio*). In 1971, the Constitutional Court declared that 553 article of Codice Penale, *Incitamento a pratiche contro la procreazione* to be unconstitutional; this article, among other norms, banned the communication and advertising of the contraceptive pill. In the same year: law 30 December 1971 n. 1204, *Tutela della lavoratrici madri*, and law 6 December 1971 n. 1044, *Piano quinquennale per l'istituzione di asili-nido comunali con il concorso dello Stato*.

⁹ Political violence was running through Italy at the time and it took visible form in the uprising of terrorism carried out both far left and far right wing political groups. Such phenomena have to be read and contextualised in a broader, and complex, national political scenario (cf. Bracke 2014a; Galleni, 1981, Crainz 2003).

If in the years between 1969 and 1975 the “strategia della tensione” (the tension strategy) unravelled, a series of attacks carried out by far right groups in a climate of collusion with high spheres of the secret services of the Italian government (Crainz, 2003, Galleni, 1981), the years from 1977 and 1980 are

motherhood and the voluntary termination of pregnancy (law 194) was approved, signalling the end of an era of protests and mobilisation that entailed feminist groups losing their sense of purpose (Giachetti 2005) and the feminist movement losing its previous centrality as the abortion issue passed into the hand of the national health system, in terms of structures and counselling (Ergas 1985).¹⁰ This trajectory was also influenced by the depth of the political crisis and the radicalisation of social movements. At the same time, groups' internal functioning and practices as well as the motives driving their political battles came into crisis, leading collectives to become increasingly fragmented (Di Cori 2012).

referred to as "anni di piombo" (Lead Years) for the intensity and frequency of the attacks of terrorist groups. Some data on the attacks are available for example thanks to the 1981 "Rapporto sul Terrorismo" (Galleni, 1981), a report on Italian terrorism between 1969 and 1981, carried out by Sezioni problemi dello Stato of PCI. According to this research, between 1969-1980 there have been 12.690 attacks resulting in 362 deaths and 172 people wounded. In the period 1969-1974 the deaths have been 92, with 63 victims of far right terrorism, 10 died in law enforcement authorities confrontations, 9 for far left actions and 10 in other or unknown circumstances. Between 1975-1980 there have been 270 deaths, 115 by far right and 110 by far left terrorism, 29 died in law enforcement authorities confrontations and 14 in other or unknown circumstances (cf. Galleni, 1981: 49-51).

¹⁰ This feeling of loss also comes through when reading the feminist publications of the period, such as EFFE. For example, the October 1979 issue launched a questionnaire, *questionario "effe" – un primo bilancio della nostra informazione*, in which the editors asked about the movement, among other issues. Of 500 respondents, more than half reported that the movement was in crisis. A crisis that was understood as "a crisis in participation, in content, in political methods". It was thus a radical crisis investing all the spheres animating a movement (Archivio Storico di Effe, <http://efferivistafemminista.it/2014/12/un-primo-bilancio-della-nostra-informazione/> – last accessed 22-11-2018). The journal *Differenze* (n.5, 1978) also gives an account of this self-perception of crisis, as do other journals of the period (as reported by Di Cori 2012: 245).

While this reading frames 1976 as the turning point of a period (De Luna 2009; Ergas 1985), other scholars, such as Bracke, argue that the end point of feminism as a mass movement should be “delayed” 5 years, to 1983. The historian argues that, on one hand, reading 1978 as the start of the decline is in line with the historiography of movements that “understands 1978 as the end of the phase of contention politics, marking the demobilisation of the radical left and the eclipsing of the cultures of 1968. [...] the period, often termed ‘withdrawal’ (*riflusso*), has been analysed in terms of people’s retreat into the private sphere and fulfilment through family and career, rather than civic engagement” (Bracke 2014a: 14); on the other hand, it is established in the memory and narration of “historical feminists” that propose 1978 as the moment of “disintegration”. However, on the basis of her interviews, she concludes that the period from late Seventies to beginning of the Eighties was a fruitful time for debates despite a sense of fatigue and disappointment. The author, in keeping with the “long 1970s” periodisation (1968-1983, cf. Baldissara 2001 for a similar use), instead proposes that 1983 be considered the endpoint of feminism as a movement. This is justified by two reasons. First, January 1983 is the publication date of the pamphlet *Sottosopra Verde. Più donne che uomini*¹¹ by *Libreria delle Donne*, which Bracke argues marked a turning point in feminist debate and organising in that it criticised the movement core practices and discourses (cf. chapter 7). Secondly, socialist politician Bettino Craxi’s rise to power symbolised the institutional stabilisation and conservative cultural reaction of the decade. Moreover, this broader periodisation would allow us to consider the birth of the *pratica del fare* with the spread of Case delle Donne, women’s libraries, and publishing and documentation efforts (cf. chapter 5), as well as the publishing of important milestones in the intellectual history of the

¹¹ *Sottosopra Verde. Più donne che uomini*, Libreria delle Donne di Milano, 1983 (<http://www.libriadelledonne.it/pubblicazioni/sottosopra-verde-piu-donne-che-uomini-gennaio-1983/> – last accessed 18-04-2017). For an English translation of the text cf. Bono and Kemp 1991: 110-23.

movement (Di Cori 2012: 198)¹² that would otherwise be conceptualised within the “declining phase”. Decline could be better read as a change in organising, participation, visibility, and political strategies. After that period, feminism did not disappear but substantially changed form.

4.2 The first feminist groups

Similarly to Europe and the United States (cf. Ferguson 1984), in Italy New Feminism emerged in the context of the new progressive movements of the Sixties (Ergas 1985; Giachetti 2005; Restaino 2002a, 2002b).¹³ Indeed, the movement was largely composed of students, although groups such as *Rivolta Femminile*, which was not connected to movements of the 1968, and DEMAU, were instead composed of highly educated professionals (Bracke 2014a); women were active in the

¹² For example, in 1976 *La signora del gioco* by Luisa Muraro and *La Resistenza taciuta. Dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi*, edited by Annamaria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina. In 1977 Lea Melandri's *L'infamia originaria* and in 1978 *Taci, anzi parla. Diario di una femminista*, by Carla Lonzi (cf. Di Cori 2012: 198).

¹³ Yasmine Ergas (Ergas 1985) contextualises the emergence of New Feminism in Italy in relation to the larger problem concerning the relationship between the women's movement and “wide ranging mobilization of new political actors”, showing that the women's rights movement arose in the wake of a moment of generalised change and crisis (for example the French Revolution, the American abolitionist movement, the Bolshevik revolution and Italian antifascism). Ergas, in her texts, tackles the issue of the relationship between the women's movement and the dynamic of “conventional politics”, showing that “women's entry into politics is facilitated when politics itself is in a state of disarray, when the rules of the game and the roles of traditional actors are already being challenged by emerging forces” (Ergas 1985: 254).

debate of the civil rights movement as a whole and engaged in discussions in the university sphere.¹⁴

For women, being involved in the 1968-69 student and civil rights movement constituted a terrain for experiencing and learning about political engagement (Ergas 1985), and simultaneously the grounds on which gender roles and contradictions exploded, leading to the constitution of specific feminist forms of organising after their separation from mixed-gender political groups (Giachetti 2005; Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Bracke 2014a; Restaino 2002b).

In its original phase, the 1968 movement shared some themes with what was to become the feminist movement, namely anti-authoritarianism, the critique of institutions, the critique of the family, a rebellion against the past *tout court* (Ergas 1985; Lussana 2012) and some methods, such as prioritising practice in developing conceptual issues and the centrality of orality (De Luna 2009); in later phases, in contrast, features such as authoritarianism and *machismo* emerged more clearly in groups (Lumley 2001). The internal contradictions of the movement were exemplified, women found, by the persistence of gendered roles within group organisation: the expression “the cyclostyle angel” was used in that period to underline the way women were usually relegated to service positions (cf. Lussana 2012; Calabrò

¹⁴ The connection between university research and the birth of early feminist texts is an interesting pattern, and one which also appears in two of the first three Italian feminist groups: *La coscienza di sfruttata* (Mazzotta, 1972) was a thesis by the *Cerchio Spezzato* group (by Luisa Abbà, Gabriella Ferri, Giorgio Lazzaretto, Elena Medi and Silvia Motta), *Femminile pateriale* (Vangelista, 1978) was the thesis of *Anabasi* founder Serena Castaldi, and *Insieme contro. Esperienze dei consultori femministi* (La Salamandra, 1976) stemmed from Clara Jourdan’s own university thesis in Methodology of the Sociological Research with Prof. Laura Balbo.

and Grasso 2004 [1985]).¹⁵ In addition, women's awareness of theoretical and political nodes such as the unproblematised conception of work as exclusively referring to paid work and continually-unquestioned relations between the sexes (Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; Lumley 2001) set the foundations for their first exodus from political parties and groups. A second mass exit happened in the second half of Seventies, when the contradictions of "double militancy" in both feminist and extra-parliamentary groups became unbearable (cf. Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]; De Lauretis 1990: 6 explains how the same phenomenon in the American *milieu* was called the "double shift").

As Italian journalist and feminist theorist Ida Dominijanni recalls:

At that time, many of us were active supporters of the 1968 movement, the New Left groups or the Communist Party. We shared their promises of equality and fraternity, until it became clear that the promise of equality required a too high price of homologation to men and the promise of fraternity concealed, as Antoinette Fouque wrote commenting upon May 1968, the construction of a "fratriarchy" which was more narcissist and no less exclusive than the already declining patriarchy. When we suddenly separated ourselves from these groups and parties, our cut registered, as Lia Cigarini has recently remembered, a real exodus from traditional politics, an exodus that split the public

¹⁵ Similar processes were happening in the US, as Kimberly Springer shows when describing the feminists' process of unveiling the contradictions and sexism inside Black liberation movement groups (Springer 2005: 47-8). For an account of a similar process of critique towards sexism and "chauvinism of men in the leftist, alternative institutions movements" in second wave feminist organisations in the US cf. also Martin 1990: 187.

sphere and gave life to a female agora based only on the free relation between and among women. (Dominijanni 2010: 170)¹⁶

It was thus at the end of the decade that the civil movement changed (Lumley 2001) – also in relation to rising violence (Levi 2001; Muraro 2008)¹⁷ – and ‘bifurcated’ into two different types of political practice that while shared the common aim of critiquing the world as it was, employed a different modality of political action. Corrado Levi¹⁸ talks about “informal” practices, leveraging on the level of personal liberation, and of “structured practices”, organised into political, extra-parliamentary groups. Levi’s narration of events – as a participant in the unfolding of this history – appears particularly interesting as it links the nature of the practice to the nature of theoretical and methodological concepts (personal, experiential knowledge versus the application of pre-determined ideological construct), and the nature of organising (informal and lean versus hierarchical and formal).

The firsts practices created the slogan the personal is political and articulated in a myriad of collectives, feminist and homosexual groups began to emerge [...], the privileged practice was consciousness raising, and starting from one’s own self,

¹⁶ In this extract, Dominijanni is citing Fouque 1999 [1995], chap. 2. The author may have chosen to use the word “fratriarchy” instead, for example, of “brotherhood”, due to its assonance and therefore reference to “patriarchy”.

¹⁷ The breaking point was the violence epitomised by the 12 December 1969 bomb in Piazza Fontana in Milan (cf. for personal accounts of this, Muraro 2008 and Levi 2001). Muraro’s texts narrate the events of 1968 from the point of view of a feminist.

¹⁸ Corrado Levi (born 1936) is an Italian architect and artist. He was involved with feminism and the gay liberation movement in Milan in the Seventies. An art critic, collector and university teacher, he was a crucial figure for contemporary art, especially in the Eighties.

everyone was carrier of accumulated knowledge that in the relational debate was emerging as collective knowledge, political psychoanalysis was living its golden age – Freud and Marx teaming up for the revolution – bloodless and to come only as a consequences of diffused personal transformations.

The second practices instead, gave birth to extra parliamentary groups, hierarchically structured according to the Leninist models, and looking up to a theoretical corpus a-critically accepted, Marxism, Maoism – even though in these groups there were contradictions and exceptions. (Levi 2001: 38-9)

This separation from the groups was thus central in constituting feminism (Lumley 2001) as women, overcoming traditional forms of militancy and political practice, started to formulate new modes of aggregation and discussion and new political concepts (Restaino 2002; Bracke 2014a). Specifically, a specific form of engagement and organising arose in this period (Ergas 1985: 253 refers to them as “organizational structures of the movement”).¹⁹ Differing from both traditional parties and political groups and already existing women’s organisations,²⁰ they were called “small groups” – capillary,

¹⁹ For a reference to the political and organisational implications of the principles of autonomy and separatism, in the context of Britain feminist movement of the Seventies cf. Brown 1992. The scholar narrates how in 1972 at a women’s liberation workshop in London women groups started to exclude men from the meetings. “From now on the women’s movement was strictly women only. The separation from the broad sweep of left politics which followed this decision meant more, however, than the exclusion of men as individuals. It also rejected forms of organizing which were defined as ‘male’. In particular, rejection of hierarchical form of organizing and of leaders was seen as vital in defining the difference of the women’s movement.” (Brown 1992: 10).

²⁰ This does not mean that small groups were the only form of women’s politics, but they did represent new types of political action and organising

decentralised and networked (Ergas 1985) small formations without any formal features: no headquarters, meetings held in private homes, and very little structure in terms of roles. Slightly different from one another in the orientation of their critiques, they are similar overall in two key approaches: the separatist position (in relation to institutions and political parties) and the practice of consciousness raising (Giachetti 2005; Bracke 2014a). The aim of the groups was to analyse oppression, as Bracke explains:

specific to Second Wave Feminism, borrowing some political struggle tools such as separatism from Black liberation organising.

Other interesting and important cases to be studied, stemming from a different tradition and rooted in the post-war era rather than the Seventies, are the women's organisations affiliated with the political parties of post-war Italy: UDI (Unione Donne Italiane, as of the PCI, Italian Communist Party, Women's Group), women's organisations such as FILF (Fronte Italiano di Liberazione Femminile, Italian Coalition of Female Liberation) and MLD (Movimento per la Liberazione della Donna, Women's liberation Movement), both born in Rome in 1970 and connected to the Radical Party. These organisations are defined by historian Lia Migale as libertarian rather than feminist formations (Migale 2016) so as to underline that they lacked the key element of separatism and mature feminist consciousness.

Moreover, other projects which are interesting yet different from small groups in terms of institutional affiliation and political paradigms are the feminist organisations stemming from workers' unions (*Intercategoriale*) and the group *Lotta Femminista*. For instance, *Intercategoriale* was a Turin-based women-only trade union aggregating the three main unions in Italy (CGIL, CISL, UIL) and mixing feminist thought and practices with the workers' struggle and protests. The *Lotta Femminista* feminist critique was based on a neo-Marxist framework of social and political analysis. Consequently, *Lotta Femminista's* main focus was the subordination of labour in the family and, therefore, one of the group's proposals for the re-appropriation of economic resources was to introduce a battle to make house and care work waged, known as "wages for housework" (cf. Bracke 2014a: 70 and, for a reproduction of translated texts by *Lotta Femminista* and by other several feminist formation of Italy, cf. Bono and Kemp 1991, chap. 12). Cf. also chapter 5, note 8.

Their endeavour was from the outset consciously political, and this was the case precisely because these groups withdrew from the political realm as shaped by 1968 (public rallies, occupations) and from historically established political methods (parties). It was a rethinking of the spaces, methods of languages and politics, involving both an intimate search for new forms of womanhood, and an investigation of the ways in which women's social roles might be transformed. (Bracke 2014a: 64)

The following section is devoted to the first documented groups exemplifying these new ideas and organisation in Italy: DEMAU, founded in Milan in 1966, Trento's *Cerchio Spezzato* founded in 1968, *Rivolta Femminile* in Rome and Milan, and *Anabasi* in Milan in 1970.²¹

4.2.1 Demau, Anabasi and Cerchio Spezzato groups

The first documented group was DEMAU (Demistificazione Autoritarsimo Patriarcale, "Demystification of Patriarchal Authoritarianism"; cf. Giachetti 2005; Bracke 2014a; Rivera Garretas 1998; Lussana 2012), established in Milan in 1965 by Daniela Pellegrini (born 1937)²² and Lia Cigarini (born 1937) and composed of around 20 educated professionals and housewives (cf. Bracke 2014a: 43; Lussana 2012: 151). Their manifesto, *Manifesto programmatico del gruppo Demau (Demistificazione Autoritarsimo)* appeared in Milan in 1966, and in 1968

²¹ Other groups are *Le Nemesiache* in Naples in 1970, while between 1971 and 1972 the *Pompeo Magno* collective and *Collettivo Senza Nome* were founded in Rome. In 1971, *Lotta Femminista* (Bologna and Padova), in 1973 *Analysis* group, and in 1974 the *Via Cherubini* collective was established in Milan.

²² Pellegrini went on to found, with Nadia Riva, the feminist cultural centre and restaurant *Cicip&Ciciap* (cf. chapter 7, note 23). For an account of the life of Daniela Pellegrini, see her autobiography (Pellegrini 2012).

the text *Il maschile come valore dominante* came out.²³ The *Manifesto's* critique focused on codified gender roles in contemporary society, while *Il maschile* tackled the “patriarchal authoritarianism” epitomised by the father and husband, thus rooting the critique in the family institution, “one of the prime areas of struggle” (DEMAU 1968: 46).²⁴

One element DEMAU expressed was a critic of the idea of emancipation;²⁵ indeed, the very first point of the *Manifesto* reads

²³ Spagnoletti (1974) [1971], Di Cori (2012) and Lussana (2012) report the appearance of the Demau *Manifesto* in 1966, while Bracke (2014a) in 1967. The text “*Il maschile come valore dominante*” appeared originally in the newspaper “*Il manifesto*”, no. 4, September 1969. I have consulted Demau material at Archivio del Femminismo, Fondazione Badaracco, Milano (1, B36,F2). Demau texts (*Manifesto programmatico*, *Alcuni problemi sulla questione femminile*, *Il maschile come valore dominante*) have been published in Spagnoletti (1974) [1971]: 26 -51). Italian version of the *Manifesto* is available online at <http://www.universitadelledonne.it/demau> (last accessed 20-11-2018) and English version, translated by V. Newman, is available in Bono and Kemp (1991): 33-5.

²⁴ From this moment on, DEMAU changed its name from Demistificazione Autoritarismo to Demistificazione Autoritarismo Patriarcale. This change deserves further investigation. For a review and analysis of the concept of “patriarchy” and the presentation of different possible definitions, cf. the chapter *Il pensiero femminista contemporaneo: categorie di analisi della società e della storia* in Rivera Garretas 1998: 39.

²⁵ The essay *Lettera da Londra sulle parole delle donne e i vocabolari degli uomini* (1987) by Paola di Cori (Di Cori 2012: 92-103) reflects on the meaning of the opposition, within feminist debate, of the pairing *uguaglianza e differenza*, and *emancipazione e liberazione*. Lia Migale defines the pairing “emancipation and liberation” in terms of a different political approach: “emancipation”, she argues, is political work situated within society as it is in order to change it, while “liberation” entails overturning the status quo beginning from its foundations (Migale 2016: 11). For a more in-depth formulation of the critique of emancipation cf. Rossanda 1987.

Opposition to the concept of the integration of women into modern society.
The group argues that such a concept in *its current meaning*:

- a) “does not resolve the incompatibility of the two roles, predetermined by the division of labour between men and women, thereby allowing its enforced coexistence only for women;
- b) on the other hand intends to liberate women from ties of a practical nature stemming from traditional roles, in order to enable them to play an active part in the cultural world and in the work sphere. But on the other hand it reconfirms within society, and for women themselves, the characteristics and duties of *their* ‘feminine’ role in so far as it envisaged a special favour only for them”.²⁶

The group, debating with other political formations,²⁷ argued that the idea of emancipation is problematic in that it entails integrating into an already defined and accepted social horizon; such integration, they argue, can only serve to marginalise women and reiterate their

²⁶ DEMAU (1966) Manifesto [English version] In BONO, P., KEMP, S. (1991) *Italian feminist thought: a reader*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell: 33-35. Translated by Veronica Newman. Italics in the original.

²⁷ In 1967 the group wrote: “Esistono in Italia e all'estero numerose associazioni e movimenti femminili che si interessano ai problemi della donna e alla sua emancipazione. La caratteristica comune di queste associazioni è quella di agire per l'istituzione di particolari accorgimenti pratici al fine di inserire e facilitare l'emancipazione della donna nella società, così com'è costruita nel momento in cui essa vive” (*Alcuni problemi sulla questione femminile*, 1967, p. 29, reported by Lussana 2012: 153). In post-war Italy, Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF) and Unione Donne Italiane (UDI) were active, both women's political organisations founded during the *Resistenza* and stemming from, respectively, the Christian Democracy Party and Communist Party. The two organisations engaged in the battle for the women's vote and in some important laws (cf. *supra* note 8; Migale 2016: 13; Lussana 2012: 17-8).

supposed feminine role;²⁸ moreover, women's oppression goes beyond the economic structure of society but its specificity lies in the sexual and familial sphere (Bono and Kemp 1991: 33; Bracke 2014a: 42). DEMAU's objective was thus to recognise and deconstruct oppression, and subsequently formulate new values with the power to "recognize and promote female autonomy" (Ergas 1987: 12). The group, acquiring the label of "gruppo di riflessione e di studio" (Lussana 2012: 153), started to practice consciousness raising from 1970 onward after encountering groups such as *Anabasi* and *Rivolta*.²⁹ As a matter of fact, the period of early feminism was characterised by informal and frequent cross-contamination among groups (Bracke 2014a: 44; Boccia 1990: 79). The same point was made by Serena Castaldi in our interview when she recalled that the women of DEMAU had attended *Anabasi* meetings and that she participated in *Rivolta* meetings as well.³⁰

Serena Castaldi is the founder of the Milan-based feminist group *Anabasi* (Lussana 2012: 159-62; Bracke 2014a: 68). Castaldi (born in 1943) was a Philosophy student at Università Statale of Milan, where she engaged with the student movement in 1968. Her encounter with feminism dates back to 1969, the year in which she went to New York to gather material for her thesis on the Black Panther party and came into contact with the Women's Liberation Movement. Once back in Italy, in May 1970, she decided to establish a similar group: in June of

²⁸ Lussana notes that these laws are to be seen as fundamental civil achievements made following years of struggle. Yet, they became a target for feminists who saw the laws as having been formed according to a logic that underlines the weakness of women and supports women's entry into the job market by underlining and "protecting" their "biological" nature (Lussana 2012: 18-9).

²⁹ The group went on to cease activity in 1973.

³⁰ Skype interview (Castaldi is now based in France) held on 3 April 2016, Milan-Nice. Cf. on this also Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985] and Pellegrini 2012).

1970 *Anabasi* was born, composed of around 10 students and a couple of housewives.³¹ Castaldi's desire to share the information she had gathered during her stay in the USA took form in an editorial project, a book called *Donne è bello* ("Women is beautiful"), a title that makes explicitly references the Black Liberation Movement's motto *Black is beautiful*. The book was informally distributed beginning in 1972 in Italy and presented several international feminist texts (groups manifestos, leaflets and articles from American and French feminism), thereby functioning as a precious 'mediator' for Italian feminism. It also offered the texts of other Italian early feminist groups such as *Rivolta Femminile* and the *Manifesto* by the *Cerchio Spezzato* group.³²

³¹ I retrieved the names thanks to a second interview to Serena Castaldi (Skype interview 15 may 2019 Milan-Nice.)

Some names of those comprising the group at the time in more stable manner are, according to Serena's memories: Mariarosa Rizzi, Serena Nozzoli, Bruna Felletti, Lillian Caruso, Luisa Messi, Lorenza Minoli, Michela Gusmeroli. Other women that had participated in Anabasi meetings but not as "core members" have been Maria d'Aquino and Giancarla Dapporto, Nilde Carrabba and also Lia Cigarini and Daniela Pellegrini. I am very grateful to Serena Castaldi for her kindness and generosity in sharing information and narrations about that period.

³² At the end of the book (p. 43) all the names and referents of the groups are provided, thus serving as an interesting document of the early groups. The groups listed are, for the Milanese area: *Collettivo Milanese per la Liberazione Femminile*, *Rivolta Femminile*, *Anabasi*, DEMAU; in Turin: *Collettivo delle compagne*; in Trento: *Cerchio Spezzato*; in Rome: *Collettivo delle Compagne (Via Pompeo Magno)* and *Rivolta Femminile*; in Ferrara and Padova: *Lotta Femminista*; in Bologna and Gela the collectives are reported without names but with the name and address of the main contact person. US was influential for Anabasi also in suggesting the way of organising the small group, as participants were sitting in circle and speaking one after the other, a modality that Castaldi observed in the meetings she took part in and that she proposed in the very first Anabasi meeting. The origin of this structure is to be found, according to Serena Castaldi, from Native American Talking Circles. Anabasi has a very

The group *Cerchio Spezzato*, founded at Trento University in 1968,³³ was like *Anabasi* born out of the 1968 movement³⁴ and likewise referenced the Black Liberation Movement, a connection communicated in their 1971 manifesto: “There is no revolution without women’s liberation, there is no women’s liberation without revolution”. The manifesto opens with the statement:

Every one of us in our group has undergone the experience of political engagement with the students’ movement and with later political formations that represent an overcoming of the movement itself [...] But we, not only as students, but also as women,³⁵ entrusted many things to this perspective of liberation by the students’ movement. At the same time, we deceived ourselves that the political group, the militancy, could have been a way to end another and very precise form of discrimination

interesting story whose relevance in the Italian milieu, is still to be adequately studied. Daniela Pellegrini in her book (Pellegrini 2012) underlines the role of Castaldi in introducing autocoscienza in Italian milieu.

³³ According to Bracke 2014a: 65, it was the first one to adopt separatism in 1970, but then she states that small groups took on separatism under the influence of *Rivolta Femminile*.

³⁴ In contrast, for generational reasons, neither DEMAU nor *Rivolta* had this kind of influence. The women of these collectives were born in the 30s, making them older than the generation that was about to engage in the activities of 1968. The groups did not have a homogeneous generational identity (Bracke 2014a: 12).

³⁵ The Italian is “Ma noi, non solo come studentesse, ma in quanto donne”. What they are saying therefore is “not only as students but also as women”, but the Italian language makes it possible to conjugate the noun according to the gender of the speaking subject, therefore they were already defining themselves in a non-neutral way.

running through capitalistic society: the one of men over women.³⁶

The text critiqued the politics of the male leadership in leftist groups and testifies to the way that the Black liberation struggle influenced the focus of autonomous politics – that is, its independence from other political actors. Racism and sexism were understood as similar forms of oppression and subordination based on factors other than class (cf. Bracke 2014a: 65).³⁷ The politics of separatism appears to be connected to the fact that women began to feel the need for a different kind of endeavour, one hinging on self-analysis:

The only possibility of liberation is acquiring collective consciousness of a specific yet common condition. To recognise oneself as woman, not anymore as inferior but as exploited, is already breaking free of the cage of one's own situation and acting as a political force questioning the existing social relations. Only an autonomous and organised women's movement can ignite a process of liberation. As African Americans recognise themselves as exploited by virtue of a fact that depends not only on class issues but on the very colour of their skin, and as they fight against a society that is not only capitalistic but also white; so women should find their concrete path towards liberation by fighting against a society that is not only capitalistic but also male-dominated.³⁸

³⁶ *Non c'è rivoluzione senza liberazione della donna*, Cerchio Spezzato, Trento, 1971. The document is available in the Italian feminism's document collection by Spagnoletti (1974) [1971]:158-161 together with another Cerchio Spezzato text "Le donne e i neri. Il sesso e il colore." (161-164.)

³⁷ The document devotes an entire chapter, *Le donne e i neri, il sesso e il colore*, to the similarities between the two forms of oppression.

³⁸ Cf. *supra* note 36.

The document closes with a statement on separatism, saying that the movement ought to be women-only because they believe that no possible relationship between the sexes can be achieved without first establishing dialogue and unity among women.

We have, inside the caste of women, a problem that is specific to this caste, and we accept a debate and collaboration with male comrades that acknowledge that we have our own mind. We are taking back our mind. We will decide on our own the political and practical positions to acquire. We will make theory and carry on practice. We will decide which measure, which tools and programs to employ to liberate ourselves.

Separatism thus represents a political strategy of developing concepts autonomously, one which necessarily entailed a process of reflection that had to exclude “the oppressor” (Giachetti 2005). At the same time, it introduces the idea of cultivating relationships among women. The groups’ organisation, based in private homes with a small number of people devoting their time mainly to *autocoscienza*, was linked to separatism. The strategy of separatism, the organisational features of the groups, and the practice of *autocoscienza* are thus configured as closely interconnected. This practice, which influenced relations with both leftist groups and other feminist organisations, was destined to be widely employed by the group *Rivolta Femminile*.

4.3 Rivolta Femminile group

To be free means refusing to stake claims on others to be saved. ³⁹

In May 1970 in Rome a series of conferences were organised by the Radical Party in which participants had the chance to learn about American Feminism, a series that constituted the inception of the Women's Liberation Movement (MLD: Movimento di Liberazione della Donna). MLD activist Lilliana Ingargiola recalls how the movement was formed after a seminar series held in Rome in the Seventies by Radical Party activists Massimo Teodori and Alma Sabatini, among others:

Teodori, in coming back from America, brought back materials and political information on the American feminist movement and shared them in the Radical Party affiliated collective 'against sexual repression and against the psychiatric institutions'. (Ingargiola and Cucchi 1987: 50-1)⁴⁰

Numerous feminists participated in these meetings, including women from *Rivolta Femminile*.⁴¹ However, Rivolta lost interest in the project

³⁹ *Libero significa che non ammette ipoteche di salvazione in mano ad altri.* Lonzi 2010b [1974]: 44-6 (the text dates 1972).

⁴⁰ Serena Castaldi came back to Italy in May 1970, while the radical Massimiliano Teodori returned in April 1970.

⁴¹ Carla Accardi and Elvira Banotti, among others. This is reported by Lussana 2012: 182, and also confirmed by the personal memories of Lilliana Ingargiola and Serena Castaldi. The latter, in her interview, told me that she went to Rome to meet the newly founded *Rivolta Femminile*.

that was about to form due to their divergent views on the issue of autonomy and separatism (Ingargiola and Cucchi 1987: 52-3).⁴²

The women of *Rivolta* and the women of *Cerchio Spezzato* of Trento, having already decided not to participate in the potential formation of a MLD, did participate in the first congress in February 1971 as a way of confirming their political strategy based on separatism (Bracke 2014a: 66)⁴³ and as a display of protest and disapproval. They showed up at the convention that was preparing to constitute the MLD in order to contest its choices. First, they raised a critique of the name itself: “we could be a possible expression of a movement of women’s liberation, but not the women’s liberation movement” (Ingargiola and Cucchi 1987: 54). In fact, *Movimento di Liberazione della Donna* translates from Italian to English as Women’s Liberation Movement, a term that does in fact suggest a broad scope and all-encompassing movement rather than the expression of one group. Secondly, they contested the choice to involve both men and women and even asked that men be expelled from the meeting, narrates Ingargiola.

This request [...] was really harsh, the situation was very tense and we were disoriented. We conceded to their request to ask men to step down from the podium, but not to remove them from the dialogue: this was not our path and our political formulation. This made these feminists groups leave the meeting.

⁴² The theme of separatism continued to run through the internal debate of MLD; after the federation in 1970, it decided to break ties with the Radical Party in the 1978 congress, the 5th congress, held in Catania (cf. Ingargiola and Cucchi 1987: 63).

⁴³ The author quotes the document: *Relazione sul convegno del MDL*, Rome, 27th-28th February 1978, CDCT/CR, Supplemento a CR – Informazioni internazionali, n.18 (s.d.), in Archivio storico del movimento femminista, Turin, Fondo “P. Zumaglini”, “Comunicazioni Rivoluzionarie”, p. 91.

The next day at the conference, when the contesting groups had left, the MLD was formed as a feminist group directly connected to the Radical Party and comprising men as well.

The separatist stance thus marks the beginning of *Rivolta Femminile*, the founding date of which is commonly referred to as July 1970, when their *Manifesto* (cf. document in image 2) appeared in the streets of Rome and Milan.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The group proclaimed its own foundation in 1970. There must have been previous moments of reflection and formalisation in the years before, however. The literature is insufficient in problematising this point. To understand this point better, the events revolving around the Radical Party seminar cycle should be further investigated. Secondly, the development of *Rivolta* should be analysed in light of its connection to the founding of the other groups active in Rome-Milan, the two cities where Lonzi spent time: *Anabasi* in Milan and *Lotta Femminista* in Rome (cf. Zapperi 2017). Moreover, Lonzi went to the USA, and, even though from her writings it is clear she did not speak English, the possible influence of the USA period on Lonzi's awareness of the feminist movement remains to be traced and ascertained.

The *Rivolta Femminile* texts I am presenting such as, for example, the *Manifesto*, come from my archival research and specifically from the material available at Archivio del Femminismo at Fondazione Badaracco in Milano. Some of these texts have been published, for example the *Manifesto* is in Lonzi 2010b [1974] and in anthologies such as Spagnoletti (1974) [1971]: 90-94. For an English version of the text cf. as well as Bono and Kemp 1991: 37-40.

IMG. 2 - *Rivolta Femminile* manifesto, English version, 5 pages, 1970, AF at FB, Milan (B. 47, F. 5). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione Badaracco, Milano.



Scritti di Rivolta Femminile

MANIFESTO

Roma, July 1970

RIVOLTA FEMMINILE

WILL WOMEN ALWAYS BE SEPARATED FROM EACH OTHER? WON'T THEY EVER FORM A UNITED BODY? (Olympe de Gouges, 1791)

The woman is not to be defined in relationship to the man. Our struggle as well as our liberty is based upon this awareness.

The man is not the model to which the woman must conform in the process of discovering herself.

The woman is "the other one" in relationship to the male. The male is "the other one" in relationship to the woman. Equality is an ideological attempt to enslave the woman at higher levels.

To identify the woman with the man means to negate the last means to liberation.

For the woman to free herself does not mean to accept the same life as the man, because it is unlivable, but to express her own sense of existence.

The woman as a subject does not refuse the man as a subject, but she refuses him in his absolute role. In social life she refuses him in his authoritarian role.

Up until now the man has used the myth of complementary roles to justify his power.

Women are persuaded from infancy not to make decisions and to depend on "capable" and "responsible" persons -- father, husband, brother ...

The image by which man has interpreted the woman is his own invention.

Virginity, chastity, fidelity are not virtues but chains to form and maintain the family.

Honour is the consequent repressive codification.

In matrimony the woman, deprived of her name, loses her identity. This means the passage of property from her father to her husband.

She who generates does not have the chance to give her own name to her children.

We are forced to revendicate the evidence of a natural fact.

In matrimony we recognize the institution that has subordinated the woman to the male. We are against matrimony.

Divorce is a graft to matrimony with which the institution is reinforced.

The transmission of life, respect for life, the sense of life are intense experiences and values of the woman that she revendicates.

The first element of rancor of the woman towards society is in being forced to face maternity without choice.

We denounce the unnaturalness of a maternity paid as the price of exclusion.

The negation of the liberty to abort is a part of the global veto to the autonomy of the woman.

We don't want to think of maternity for a lifetime and to continue to be unconscious instruments of patriarchal power.

The woman is fed up of raising a son that will become her bad lover.

In a liberty that she wants to face the woman frees her son also, and her son is humanity.

In all forms of life in common, feeding, cleaning and caring for, and all moments of everyday living there must be reciprocal participation.

As a result of education and mimicry, man and woman are already in their roles from early infancy.

We recognize the mystified character of all ideologies because through their reasoned forms of power (theological, moral, philosophical and political) they have forced humanity into an unauthentic, oppressed and consenting condition.

Behind every ideology we can discern the hierarchy of the sexes.

From now on we don't want any screen between us and the world.

Feminism was the first political movement of historical criticism of the family and society.

We unite the situations and episodes of historical feminine experience: for the first time the woman has shown herself breaking into the monologue of patriarchal civilization.

In unpaid domestic labor we identify the service that allows capitalism, both private and state, to subsist.

Will we continue to allow that which keeps happening at the end of every popular revolution, when the woman, who fought alongside the others finds herself and her problems put aside?

We detest the competitive mechanisms and blackmail that are a part of the hegemony of efficiency. We want to put our working capacities at the disposal of a society which is immunized against it.

War has always been the specific activity of the male and his model of virile behaviour.

Equality of retribution is our right, but our oppression is another thing. Is equal salary sufficient when we are already burdened with hours of house-work?

Let's re-examine the creative contributions of the woman to the community and let's destroy the myth of her subsidiary laboriousness.

To give high value to "unproductive" moments is an extension of life proposed by the woman.

He who has power states: "it is typical of eroticism to love an inferior being". Therefore to maintain the status quo is an "act of love" of his.

We accept free sexuality in all its forms because we have stopped considering frigidity as an honourable alternative.

To continue to regulate life between the sexes is necessary to power. The only satisfying choice is a free relationship.

Sexual curiosity and sexual games are the right of children and adolescents.

We have watched for 4000 years. Now we have seen.

We have behind us the apotheosis of the age-old masculine supremacy. Institutionalized religions have been its most secure pedestal. And the concept of "genius" has always been its unreachable stop.

The woman has had the experience of seeing destroyed every day whatever she made.

We consider a history that has been built only upon unperishable traces as incomplete.

The presence of the woman has been handed down poorly or not at all. It is up to us to rediscover the truth.

Civilization has defined us as inferior. The church has called us sex. Psycho-analysis has betrayed us, marxism has sold us to a hypothetical revolution.

We ask references on milleniums of philosophical thought that has theorized the inferiority of the woman.

We consider the philosophers as responsible for the great humiliation that the patriarchal world has imposed upon us. They have upheld the principle of the woman as an additional being for the reproduction of humanity, a tie with divinity or the threshold to the animal world, a private and religious compassion sphere. In metaphysics they have justified that which is unjust and atrocious in the life of a woman.

We spit on Hegel.

The slave-master dialectic is a regulation of power between collective groups of men. It does not foresee the liberation of the woman, the great oppressed one of patriarchal civilization.

Likewise, the class struggle, as a revolutionary theory developed from the slave-master dialectic, excludes the woman. We question socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Not recognizing herself in masculine culture, the woman subtracts from it the illusion of universality.

The man has always spoken in the name of the human race, but half of the world population now accuses him of having sublimated a mutilation.

The strength of the man is his identifying himself with the culture. Our strength is to refuse it.

After this act of awareness, the man will be distinct from the woman and he will have to listen to her and hear what concerns her.

The world will not go to pieces if the man no longer has the psychological equilibrium based on our submission.

In the burying reality of a universe that has never unveiled its secrets, we deny much of the credit given to the obstinacies of culture.

We want to be at the level of a universe without answers.

We are seeking an authentic act of revolt, and we will not sacrifice it either to organization or to proselytism.

Rome (Italy) july 1970.



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Piazza Baracca, 8 - 20123 MILANO, Italia

The group was founded by Carla Lonzi (1931-1982), Carla Accardi (1924-2014) and Elvira Banotti (1933-2014) and the manifesto was formulated collectively even though it was materially written by Lonzi.⁴⁵ Carla Lonzi, one of the most important figures of Italian feminism, was an art historian, pupil of Roberto Longhi and art critic⁴⁶ up until the 1969 publication of *Autoritratto* (De Donato), a montage of interviews with 14 contemporary artists. Carla Accardi was an artist and part of the *Forma Uno* group while Elvira Banotti was a militant activist with a background in investigative journalism and writing who went on to distinguish herself primarily thanks to her pamphlet on illegal abortions.⁴⁷

The group's fondness for separatism is made explicit in the *Manifesto* as it closes with a statement in block letters, bigger than the rest of the text: *Comunichiamo solo con donne*, "We only communicate with women".

⁴⁵ Carla Lonzi's diary, *Taci, anzi parla. Diario di una femminista*, reads: "At the beginning Vanda was with me and Ester and together we made the Manifesto" (Lonzi 1978: 700). Lonzi, narrating the unfolding of her personal life, decided to use pseudonyms to refer to other people. In this quotation, Vanda is Elvira Banotti, Ester is Carla Accardi.

⁴⁶ Contributor to *Paragone*, *L'approdo letterario*, *Marcatré* and curator of contemporary artists such as Carla Accardi, Jannis Kounellis and Pietro Consagra.

⁴⁷ Banotti 1971. Shortly after the circulation of the manifesto the group split up, with the exit of Banotti. "The divide and the proper birth of *Rivolta* happened in 1970 when, shortly after the posting of the manifesto, July 1970, of the publishing of *Let's Spit on Hegel*" (Lonzi and Jaquinta in Lonzi 1985: 29). I have not found relevant information on the background of the other *Rivolta* participants. From the material available on *Rivolta* it is possible to deduce that Jaqueline Vodoz was a photographer and Marta Lonzi an architect. Zapperi reports that, at the beginning of *Rivolta*, in the very early phases antecedent to the manifesto, Ginevra Bompiani and Dacia Maraini were part of the group as well, and that it also included numerous artists (cf. Zapperi 2017: 44).

The *Rivolta* writings explicated the theme of “difference” which later come to characterise Lonzi’s thought and the reception of her work. This theme appears first in the *Manifesto*, presented through brief statements, and is also found in the text *Sputiamo su Hegel* (1970) where Lonzi articulates an idea of difference understood as a position, deriving from a historical and cultural background that excluded women, to be exploited as a vantage point: difference thus means engaging in *acting differently*. Secondly, it is Lonzi’s argument that such difference, the content of which is never defined, is existential, and puts the emphasis on women as autonomous subjects.

Equality is a juridical principle. To the common denominator of all human beings justice should thus be rendered. Difference is an existential principle which concerns the modes of being human, the peculiarity of one’s own experiences, goals, possibilities, and one’s sense of existence in a given situation and in the situation one wants to create for oneself. [...] Woman’s difference is her millennial absence from history. Let us profit from this difference; for once we have achieved inclusion in society, who is to say how many more centuries will have to pass before we can throw off this new yoke? The task of subverting the order of the patriarchal structure cannot be left to others. Equality is what is offered as legal rights to colonised people. And what is imposed on them as culture. It is the principle through which those with hegemonic power continue to control those without. The world of equality is the world of legalised oppression and one-dimensionality. In the world of difference, terrorism discards its weapons and oppression yields to the variety and multiplicity of life. Equality between the sexes is merely the mask with which woman’s inferiority is disguised. This is the stand of those

who, being different, want to effect a total change in the culture that has held them prisoners. (Lonzi 2010b[1974]: 14-5.⁴⁸

As should be clear from the above passage, the concept of “difference” in Italian feminism is not to be understood as a ‘thing’, that is, a difference in content or attributes between two different entities, men and women. It is this usage that critiques to Feminism of Difference have focused on (Rivera Garretas 1998; Boccia 1987), thereby slipping into an “essentialist fallacy” (Bracke 2014a: 67)⁴⁹. Rather, Lonzi conceptualizes difference as a philosophical and political position wherein women as subjects must work for their social and symbolic existence starting from themselves and not by comparing themselves to the terms of another subject. Politically, this means that feminist work does not aspire to achieve inclusion or integration into a system that has provided the foundations for the exclusion of women.⁵⁰

Some extracts from the manifesto might clarify this point

⁴⁸ The text, *Sputiamo su Hegel* dates 1970. The excerpt is from the English version of the text published in Bono, P. and Kemp, S. (1991): 40-59. Translated by Veronica Newman

⁴⁹ While Italian philosophers of difference stress how difference should not be understood in essentialist terms. As Carla Locatelli explains: “Thinking difference [...] means thinking it as a ‘differential’, not as an oppositional trait, and even less as an essentialist feature of sexuality and / or subjectivity (Locatelli 2007: 340).

⁵⁰ In order to avoid a misinterpretation of Feminism of Difference in the Italian case, it might be useful to use the Anglo-Saxon categories of ‘liberal’ versus ‘radical’ feminism, and their different interpretation of the meaning of inclusion in society as it is (for an account of these differences cf. Ferguson 1984: 5, 121; Benschop and Verloo 2016).

The woman is not to be defined in relationship to the man. Our Struggle as well as our liberty is based upon this awareness.

The man is not the model to which the woman must conform in the process of discovering herself.

[...]

The woman as a subject does not refuse the man as subject, but she refuses him in his absolute role. In social life she refuses him in his authoritarian role.⁵¹

In the project of fighting for the recognition of a female subject Lonzi and *Rivolta* built on the relative position of women in relation to men, thus generating a debate among women as well. In *La donna vaginale e la donna clitoridea*, Lonzi formulates a concept of and defines differences among women in terms of their position relative to men in sexual relationships, the figure of two different ways of pursuing individual affirmation and independence; in the second manifesto, *I say I* (1977), the group vehemently re-asserts its distance from other women, but in this case focused on the political strategies they have adopted. The manifesto refers directly to other women, targeting them for their non-separatist and emancipatory stance, with emancipation interpreted as a liberal project of seeking inclusion in the male-dominated order.⁵²

The group's divergence from other feminist political formations became evident on the terrain of the political battle for an abortion law as part of a series of events that came to characterise both the movement's peak of visibility and its dilution. Abortion became a

⁵¹ *Rivolta Femminile* manifesto, English version, 5 pages, 1970, AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.

⁵² *Rivolta Femminile* (1977). *Io dico io* (second manifesto), published in Lonzi et al. (1978): 7-9; English version available in Bono and Kemp 1991: 59-6.

political fight⁵³ waged by not only the MLD but other groups as well: during the second great protest for the approval of the abortion law in the spring of 1976, women from different political spheres joined together for the first time.⁵⁴ This fight was articulated in terms of women's control over their own bodies: the decision to abort is a freely made decision and, as such, ought to be the prerogative of women alone, not governed by either the state or the Church; as a medical operation, they argued, it must be financially covered and guaranteed by the State.⁵⁵

Rivolta Femminile had communicated its opposition to the terms in which the debate was articulated since 1971 with the pamphlet *Sessualità femminile e aborto* (Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1971), in which they argued that the public debate was failing to deal with the issue of

⁵³ In the first months of 1975 the Constitutional Court declared some Code Rocco norms on the *protezione della stirpe* illicit. The legislative void created as a result, coupled with public mobilisation on the topic of abortion rights, forced the political parties to deal with the issue. In 1975 a great deal of public and mediatic attention was accorded to the topic after the Radical Party secretary Gianfranco Spadaccia and the secretary of CISA (Centro d'Informazione sulla Sterilizzazione e sull'Aborto) Adele Faccio and Emma Bonino, were imprisoned for illegally practicing abortions, a crime for which they deliberately turned themselves in. In 1978 law 194/78 was approved. The *Movimento per la Vita* asked for an abrogative referendum: in 1981, 68% of the population voted against it (cf. Migale 2016: 28).

⁵⁴ The event is important as, breaking with their traditions, UDI and of leftist party delegations accepted the separatism of the rally. The two parts were destined to merge again in the Eighties to present a common law proposal against sexual violence (approved in 1996 after almost 20 years of *iter parlamentare*).

⁵⁵ For a detailed account of the debate in terms of the positions of political parties, cf. Ergas 1985; for an account of the debate within the feminist movement, cf. Ergas 1987 and Paolucci 1987. On the history of the debate in Italy, cf. Bravo 2008 and Galeotti 2003.

female sexuality and relations among the sexes. Similarly, other collectives such as the *Cherubini* collective in Milan argued for the importance of a different approach, as paraphrased in the title of their 1975 pamphlet “We are working on a different political approach” (*Noi sull’aborto facciamo un lavoro politico diverso*):

We have neither supported nor participated in the demonstrations for free abortion on demand: we are working on a different political approach to the problem of abortion. Free abortion means that we will spend less money and be spared some physical pain: for this reason, none of us is against a medical and legal reform which is concerned with the prevention of pregnancy, and its interruption. But between this and going on marches in general, and what is more, with men, there is a big difference; because such demonstrations are in direct contrast to the political practice and to the consciousness that women engaged in the struggle have expressed in recent years.⁵⁶

Both the statement from Cherubini (“none of us is against [...] a reform”) and the *Rivolta* manifesto with its passage addressing the “liberty to abort” as the “autonomy of the woman” clarify an important point: these groups were not taking a position against women’s access

⁵⁶ The original title of the text is *Noi sull’aborto facciamo un lavoro politico diverso*, documento del collettivo milanese di Via Cherubini, January 1975, in Sottosopra 1975 (*Sottosopra. Sessualità, procreazione, maternità, aborto*, Fascicolo speciale “Documenti di gruppi femministi. Testimonianze di donne”, 1975). Other accounts on the debate are collected in the *Sottosopra Rosa. Alcuni documenti sulla pratica politica*, December 1976.

This quotation comes from the English translation: A group of women from the feminist collective of Via Cherubini, *We are working on a different political approach*, Milan, 1975, in Bono and Kemp 1991: 223, translated by Giuliana De Novalis.

to abortion. Rather, the positions they laid out advocated for a different kind of “political work”. What these two groups were contesting was the exploitation of women’s issues by political parties, and men in general, who were not engaged in questioning their own sexual behaviour and exploitation of female bodies and sexuality. As Bracke explains:

the gender-mixed nature of the campaign for a referendum was opposed, noting that “there are other battles that can be fought together with men, such as those on work”, but that anything to do with sexuality needed to be tackled separately. “Instead of marching for free abortion, men first need to interrogate their own sexual practices” it was added. (Bracke 2014a: 85)

The second crucial issue at stake was about defining abortion as a ‘right’ (and indeed, I read *Rivolta*’s use of the word *liberty* and not *right* as part of this position). I will try to explain this by making use of a recent interview with philosopher Luisa Muraro, on the occasion of the debate surrounding the Irish referendum on abortion (25th May 2018). Saying that abortion is not a right does not mean that it is not among a woman’s faculties to abort. It means rather that aborting lies within a woman’s liberties, as part of an unalienable principle of female freedom; the concept of ‘right’ instead implies that a woman is granted something by someone else, someone who has the power to define that practice as lawful or unlawful. Right implies “permission to do”, and a woman “should not have to ask permission to become or not become a mother. The law can grant recognition to women’s self-direction by sanctioning the fact that only women have the faculty to decide and that the health care system is at their disposal, etc. In synthesis, the issue is that

Within, behind, the idea of a right to abort, there is patriarchy [...] In fact, outside the symbolic reference of patriarchy what sense does it make? Why should a woman have the right to do what no-one has the right to impose on or deny to her? That is why, in the Seventies, instead of a new law, numerous feminists were advocating for a de-penalisation of abortion: to remove it from the code as a felony.⁵⁷

The events revolving around the battles for abortion came to be read as a turning point for feminism as a mass movement in that they brought to light crucial nodes exemplifying divergent forms of political action within feminism. Specifically, Gabriella Paolucci (Paolucci 1987) has interpreted the process as an example of the difficulties of holding together “in political praxis the personal transformations with the ‘concrete’ ones [...] the project of liberation with the steps of its effective realisation”. Against the grain of the terms of the abortion debate, feminist groups (for example, *Rivolta* and *Cherubini* mentioned above) were articulating a sophisticated and complex discourse that was deeply radical in refusing what participants viewed as a concession granted by the patriarchy. In doing so, however, to paraphrase Gabriella Paolucci (Paolucci 1987), they remained in the terrain of separatism instead of engaging with the complexity of social action.

4.3.1 *Rivolta Femminile* publishing house

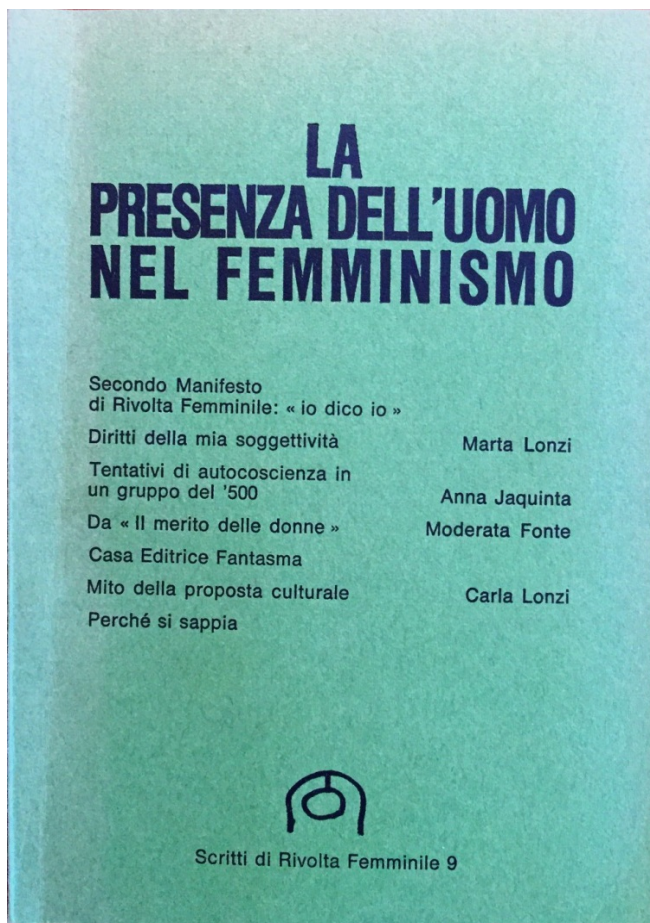
Scritti di Rivolta Femminile also engaged with the issue of separatism. This first feminist publishing house, founded in 1970, was unique in that it published written accounts of *autocoscienza* along with some polemical pamphlets. Although *Rivolta* as a project continued beyond 1975, it was grounded in the early feminist experiences that this chapter treats. Moreover, it constitutes an exception to the pattern I am presenting throughout this chapter and the following, that is, the

⁵⁷ Libreria delle Donne di Milano (2018).

fading out of small, *autocoscienza*-oriented groups around 1975 and the concomitant rise of practical endeavours such as publishing houses. In fact, not only did *Rivolta* continue to practice *autocoscienza* well after 1975, it also opened a publishing house as early as 1970. The *Scritti di Rivolta* case is crucial for introducing themes such as the relationship between feminist practices and cultural endeavours that I have read as central for the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* as well.

The first text published by *Scritti di Rivolta Femminile* was Carla Lonzi's 1970 *Let's spit on Hegel*, sold for 300 liras (Lonzi and Jaquinta 1985: 29). The first editorial series was called *Libretti verdi*, the "Little green books", a direct referral (in line with a certain feminist taste for materiality and the contextual) to the now iconic form and colour of the *Rivolta* group: little green books featuring the *Rivolta* symbol and simple titles in black text, frequently quite bold in their content. The green series was followed in 1980 by the series *Prototipi* ("Prototypes").

IMG. 3 - Image of the cover of a *Rivolta Femminile* Book (Lonzi M., 1978)
My photograph.



A presentation of the publishing house from October 1978 reads:

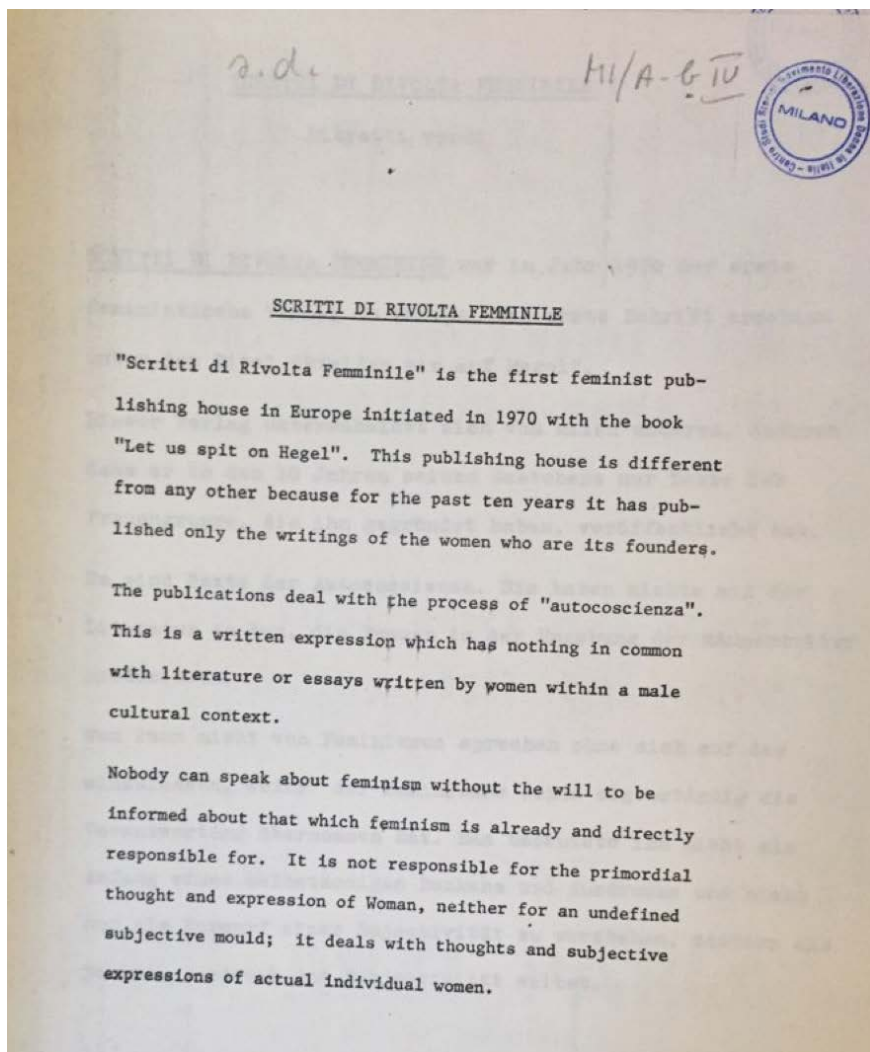
The publishing house of Rivolta Femminile was born with two
little books [they are referring to *Sputiamo su Hegel* and *La donna*

clitoridea e la donna vaginale] that we self-distributed in 1971 in feminist groups and in a few bookstores, the rare ones that did not judge them *a priori* as subcultural products. We immediately realised that our endeavour [*impresa*] was difficult, yet not impossible, and that we could not renounce the benefit of autonomy. On the one hand refusing the legitimisation of a publisher was an expression – symbolic and also very practical – of our rejection of the cultural context, and was also making us accountable. On the other, self-publishing meant protecting us from the risk of losing our identities – female actions are often the target of misunderstandings. The crucial point for us is to gain consciousness that the discovering of one's own self is achieved through the practice of writing.⁵⁸

Even this brief presentation (the translation is mine, for an English version written by the women of *Rivolta* that is substantially more synthetic, cf. image 4) conveys the idea that autonomy and autonomous expression are based on two spheres of practice: organisational and theoretical.

⁵⁸ Casa Editrice Rivolta Femminile, typewritten text, one page, October 1978, AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.

IMG. 4 - Typewritten text presentation of the publishing house in English titled "Scritti di Rivolta Femminile. Manifesto", one page, Rome, July 1970 AF at FB, Milan (B. 47, F. 5). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione Badaracco, Milano.



In terms of organising, there was no distinction between those who ran the publishing house, those whose work was published (its authors), and the collective members; the books themselves were independently printed and distributed. The group cites some “rare” bookstores that helped with distribution; a reference that also appears at the end of the presentation page. The passage, in fact, is followed by a list of the published books and closes with a direct communication to the readers: “Ask for them in bookstores or directly from us” (one address in Milan and one in Rome are provided).⁵⁹ There is no specification of which bookstores, suggesting that women within the movement already knew which places were selling *Rivolta* books; the *Libreria delle Donne* was certainly one of them. This fact was expressed in interviews and confirmed by documental analysis. For example, a trace of the relationship between the *Libreria* and *Scritti di Rivolta* group can be found in a 1980 invoice the independent publishing house sent to the bookshop, as the latter had acquired a total of 24 books by Lonzi and *Rivolta* for the sum of 61,267 liras.⁶⁰ In spring 2018 the *Libreria* took possession of the remaining stock of original books from *Rivolta Femminile*’s last member, thus reinforcing its role as a key reference point nationwide for the acquisition of Lonzi’s original books. Secondly, the passage touches on the issue of the group’s relationship with culture, formulated as a position of detachment but also as a new

⁵⁹ Typewritten text presentation of the publishing house, one page, October 1978, AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.

⁶⁰ Invoice to *Rivolta Femminile*, “Fattura n. 22”, 16th December 1980, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Administrative documents”, 1.5. B. 26, “Fatture fornitori M-Z. 1980”. The letterhead indicates that *Scritti di Rivolta Femminile* was based in Milano.

Libreria bought Carla Lonzi’s *Sputiamo su Hegel* (1 copy), *Taci, anzi parla. Diario di una femminista* (3 copies) and *Vai pure* (5 copies), Carla Accardi’s *Superiore e inferiore* (2 copies), Alice Martinelli’s *Autocoscienza* (2 copies), Maria Grazia Chinese, *La strada più lunga* (1 copy) and the group’s *È già politica* (6 copies) and *La presenza dell’uomo nel femminismo* (4 copies).

proposition, the “novelty” to which they refer. The group’s aversion to male-driven cultural institutions has its antecedents in Lonzi’s book *Autoritratto* (1969) and was also explicated in later texts such as *Assenza della donna dai momenti celebrativi della manifestazione creativa maschile*.⁶¹

Moreover, this issue that appears in a scattered way throughout Lonzi’s diary (Lonzi 1978) is somehow granted mature form in *Vai pure. Dialogo con Pietro Consagra* (Lonzi 1980). The last book Lonzi wrote before her death, *Vai Pure* constitutes not only an exploration of the issue of independence in a relationship with a man, debating the conditions under which a romantic relationship might exist between two subjects, but also a reflection on the meaning of culture and cultural production. In *Vai pure*, Lonzi takes a stance on cultural production. The conflict Lonzi identifies between artistic production and human relations is not only about privileging human relations over (creative) production, it is also about accounting for and granting importance to the relational dimension in the moment of writing – writing which, stripped from its contextual roots, is no longer authentic (Bertelli and Equi Pierazzini 2017).

The group interpreted culture as a societal sphere no less influenced by masculinity and its values than politics or other institutions. And yet, it was precisely this arena – if we understand culture as the sphere of symbolic production at large – that the group wished to modify. The act of founding a publishing house is not framed by the group as a cultural endeavour, but it can be read as an endeavour seeking to modify culture by re-framing it as the space in which individuals can engage in the autonomous exploration and definition of the self. “The publication deals with the process of ‘autocoscienza’. This is a written expression which has nothing in

⁶¹ In Lonzi 2010b [1974]: 49-51

common with literature or essays written by women within a male cultural context".⁶²

This radical understanding of cultural action provides the background against which we can understand both the group's internal split, between fellow founder and artist Carla Accardi and Lonzi – Lonzi 'disapproved' of Accardi's continued attachment to the role of the artist and her involvement in creative work, seeing this as a way of seeking confirmation of her own value in a masculine-oriented world – and the group's detachment from another feminist endeavour, Laura Lepetit's feminist publishing house *La Tartaruga*, which I address in chapter 5.

Indeed, there are clues that both Lonzi and the group were working on another publishing house, a project that was first abandoned only to be salvaged by Laura Lepetit, at the time a member of *Rivolta*. Several passages in Lonzi's diary provide accounts suggesting that she and the group were debating opening a publishing house.

Sometimes I wonder: I should do a publishing house and publish all women's writing that I find interesting, from the past and the present. It would be nice if this expression of the self were to be diffused, that other women were reading, meditating... and I would like to be the one writing introductions, some comments. There are so many precious analogies in my mind, so many enlightening... (Diary entry, 20 January 1974, from Lonzi 1978: 536)

⁶² Typewritten text presentation of the publishing house in English titled "Scritti di Rivolta Femminile. Manifesto", one page, Rome, July 1970, AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.

Even though Lonzi is interested in written texts and has diverse projects in mind (“I have many ideas, for example, an editorial series publishing university thesis by women on women. It would end the painful sensation that research and data always end up in the same hands” (Lonzi 1978: 669), however, she does not view the editorial endeavour as a sphere of activity *per se*; for her, it is only significant insofar as it is related to feminism and feminist consciousness-raising. [The publishing house] “represents the concrete application of capacities already tested in a known environment, it is not promising anything new. It is an appendix of feminism, not a way to come back into society” (Lonzi 1978: 669).

It was this divergent view that generated disagreement with Lepetit, as she instead wanted to set up a publishing house. Lonzi had a negative view of the project as it was being developed, not only as a mainly commercial venture – “but this publishing house is a capitalistic enterprise!” exclaims Lonzi (Lonzi 1978: 923) – but also because she perceived Lepetit’s idea as an instrumental use of a political project and an act of ‘stealing’ a common venture and idea.

In the end, even though with some hesitations, I feel I am going to endure Paula’s tyranny as something inevitable.⁶³ Up until yesterday I was hoping to clarify things with her, to come back to a common work and collective projects, but Paula cannot let go of her dream to be “the editor of women’s writings”, and this makes explaining pointless. She demands autonomy when she needs it to do what she wants without obstacles, but in the meantime she appropriates a common heritage that bears my mark. (Diary entry, 18 February 1975, from Lonzi 1978: 952-53)

⁶³ Paula is the name that stands for Laura Lepetit in the diary.

In 1976 *Rivolta* launched a project, *Casa Editrice Fantasma*, the “ghost publishing house”. In the text explaining their motivations for this project they go over the reasons why they had not wanted to start a ‘traditional’ publishing house a couple of years earlier, thus giving us more elements to understand the rupture between *Rivolta* and *La Tartaruga*.⁶⁴ They say that they wanted to found a publishing house and were about to establish a cooperative to do so, but then they gave up this idea for a series of reasons that they define as “intolerances” (*insofferenze*). They could not stand “a program of already established deadlines to respect in order to publish [...], to have to be inside the distribution system”, they could not stand “the inevitable diplomatic relations with culture and journalism figures” as well as “the role of the women publisher as a successful figure”.⁶⁵

The *Casa Editrice Fantasma* project represented a way of solving their problems, they say: “This solution offers so many benefits for our needs that it seems to be tailor-made for us. It allows us to overcome in one leap the organisational and lifestyle obstacles we just mentioned and to lay bare our competences and intuitions.”⁶⁶ The *Casa Editrice Fantasma*, as I read it, constituted an essentially an artistic endeavour. Basically, they opted to insert into every one of their subsequent publications what they call “the ghost of a book”: a cover page of a book by a writer of the past, either published or never published, sometimes coupled with some information about the life and thought of the featured author.

⁶⁴ The text I am referring to dates to September 1976 and appears in Chinese et al. 1977: 95-6. In this book, the project of the “ghost publishing house” entailed two cover pages: the book *Rime* by Atalanta Donati (1559) and *Il merito delle donne* by Moderata Fonte (1592).

⁶⁵ Chinese et al. 1977: 95

⁶⁶ Chinese et al. 1977: 95-6

Rivolta took the modes and content of political projects to be inseparable: autonomy in organising and autonomy in cultural production went hand in hand. In a 1978 letter they recall how *Rivolta Femminile*

has never had a leader, nor an organisation, nor a hierarchical structure; it does not have any contact with political parties, it does not share nor formulate ideologies, it does not advocate for reforms and [...] has understood since the beginning the importance of meeting in women-only settings. [...] In 1970 we founded our own publishing house, the first in Italy run by women, in order to publish without any interference the writings of the women of the group. This is the very special character [*carattere particolarissimo*] of our editorial activity.⁶⁷

Their claim that they have neither an organisation nor leadership should be read as part of their own self-narration. In fact, the group undoubtedly had a leading figure, Carla Lonzi, even if not in a strictly hierarchical sense, and they were organised, although their specific form of organisation was alternative. Actually, it could be argued that they attributed substantial importance to organising activities: they underline the fact that the publishing house is run by women, they assert the importance of women-only aggregation, and it is interesting to note that there is a link and form of continuity between mundane, day-to-day organising and the cultural and political project of the group. This is further clarified by the following statement in which *Rivolta* expresses its refusal to leave traces of its activities in the fear that it will be made into an object of study:

⁶⁷ Letter signed by *Rivolta* to the feminist magazines *Courage* in Berlin and *Emma* in Cologne, requesting publication, Milan, 21 January 1978, as reported in Lonzi et al. (1978): 176-79.

We don't share data on our composition and our internal functioning outside of feminism: not even to those girls who are preparing university 'theses'. Feminism's relationship with institutions of male culture does not envisage sharing information, which would allow men to watch over our moves.⁶⁸

At first analysis, this expression might sound problematic, as it represents a conscious refusal to communicate with younger generations, thus bringing the question of heritage transmission in feminist history to the fore. Fiamma Lussana, in reflecting on the difficulty of writing a history of feminism not only because of the concrete obstacles in reconstructing such a history, but also because of the active role played by feminist groups, reads the aforementioned pages as a refusal to leave readable traces and thus to be recorded in history (Lussana 2012: 12).

On the contrary, I read this statement precisely as an attempt to safeguard the possibility of transmitting feminism. The complete passage will help in illustrating my point:

[...] that would allow men to watch over our moves as they unfold, with a service that facilitates the male scholar's [*lo studioso*] gaze on us. We ask of the girls not a 'thesis', which would exploit the work that feminists are doing, but to stop and reflect in the moment of encounter with feminism, an encounter from which they can gain new critical energy to be employed in undermining male certainties from within the fortresses of his culture.

⁶⁸ *Per l'identificazione di Rivolta Femminile*, signed "Rivolta Femminile", typewritten text, Rome, 4th February 1972, conserved at AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.

The passage is not about a refusal to grant access to materials; rather, it expresses the search for a relationship – it is not by chance that they speak about *asking* the students to stop and reflect in their encounter with feminism – and constitutes an act of feminist teaching. In fact, it introduces, via concrete practice, the possibility of transformation in inter-generational relations, thus ensuring that feminist practice is transmitted as epistemology to the actual, living, researching body.

4.3.2 The consciousness raising practice

According to this theoretical framework, personal liberation and the possibility of individual transformation as a fundamental step in societal transformation was achieved primarily through the practice of *autocoscienza*.⁶⁹

By acquiring conscience of the conditioning that we are subjected to, the cultural ones, the ones that we don't know about, the ones that we don't even imagine that we have, we might discover

⁶⁹ Even if, as pointed out in this text, *Rivolta Femminile* and Lonzi did not take part in the 1968 movement, Lonzi also displays a link with the cultures of liberation precisely via this issue of personal transformation. Lonzi underlines her interest in the figure of rebellious hippies embodying an innovative way of doing politics in the consistency between their political ideas and life choices (cf. Boccia 1987: 43). The hippy represents a way of doing politics via transformation of the self that is dear to Lonzi. While students move as a category and work to change society's structures, hippies are seen as those working *in primis* to change themselves and to adapt their personal transformation to the transformation of the society they seek to create. Lonzi writes in *Autoritratto*: "students are politicised and therefore they are already older in their mind, because politics is an old thing as a need, a tool, as method. It is always a sort of disciplinary way to relate to an ideal thing. [...] While [...] they [the hippies], it is very relevant that they are not sacrificing themselves, you know? They are really working to transform themselves" [...]. (Lonzi 1969: 214; underlining mine).

something essential, something that changes everything – the sense of ourselves, of our relationships, of life. While delving into and understanding oppression, the sense of liberation was becoming deeper, interiorised. This is why consciousness raising [*la presa di coscienza*] is the only way, otherwise we might fight for a liberation that will prove to be only exterior, apparent, illusory.⁷⁰

Autocoscienza is the term that translates the American political practice of “consciousness raising” in the Italian socio-cultural *milieu*. Both consciousness raising and separatism are practices stemming from the USA (Giachetti 2005; Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]). The former (introduced in 1969 by the New York feminist group Red Stockings) was imported to Italy via traveling texts and leaflets brought to Italy on the occasion of conferences or through the active work of feminists such as Serena Castaldi, the founder of the group *Anabasi*. It ended up being developed and refined particularly in the Italian *milieu* as the practice of *autocoscienza*. The latter, originally developed as a political strategy by Black liberation movement, arrived in Italy already ‘mediated’, in a sense, by the way it had been translated by American feminism. Kimberly Springer (2005), in her empirical work on five Black feminist organisations active in the period from 1968 to 1980, describes the process of consciousness raising. She gives examples of the Black liberation movement’s influence in the creation of the practice and, thanks to her interviews, provides an oral narration of how the process of consciousness raising, conceptualised as a “cognitive liberation process in motion for black feminists to make connections between social structures, racism, sexism, and classism in their lives”, occurred (Springer 2005: 118).

In Italy, as Bracke explains:

⁷⁰ Carla Lonzi, *Premessa*, in Lonzi 2010b [1974]: 2-3 [text dating 1973].

Women-only meetings formed the setting for what was proposed as free exploration of womanhood. Consciousness raising – referred to as *auto-coscienza* or *presa di coscienza* (capture of consciousness) – was aimed at creating a new, critical awareness of one's desires, needs and social roles. (Bracke 2014a: 66-7)

In Italy as well, therefore, the practice of *autocoscienza* had an element of 'cognitive liberation', as can be deduced from the definition offered by Bracke. At the same time, however, it also came to acquire a very specific prominence. The practice, specifically in its component of women sharing their experiences in relational settings, was imbued with intense political and theoretical significance (De Lauretis 1990: 7)⁷¹ and thus proved highly influential in later feminist theorising. Indeed, this significance can be seen in the way the practice – which at its core consisted in talking about things, experiences or anything related to the self, in a women-only space – is defined by Bono and Kemp (1991):

It refused any cultural mediation in order to assume the intrinsic value of women's lives, thus establishing a link between theory and practice. [...] Though much time was devoted to the discussion of oppression [...] this practice also suggested the possibility, the importance, the intricacy and beauty of relationships with women. Thus, the experience of *autocoscienza* has continued to act within the Italian feminist movement long

⁷¹ De Lauretis argues that consciousness raising in the American *milieu* was less relevant because "easier institutional access and a less gendered segregated history of white women in the public sphere [...] favoured the diffusion, much earlier on, of the sites and modes of feminist consciousness" (De Lauretis 1990: 7). In parallel, she argues, separatism was a practice that seemed at once more feasible and more dangerous in that it generated fears of exclusion from the professional, heterosexist social world.

after it had been abandoned as an actual practice, with far more wide- reaching effects than the consciousness raising groups which had inspired it had. (Bono and Kemp 1991: 11)

Autocoscienza, recognised as a fundamental practice, was adopted by most of the groups but also abandoned once it started to lose its transformational value and was increasingly perceived as unproductive (Boccia 1990: 191-94). Understood as merely the encounter between one's own personal expression and the condition of women 'at large', *autocoscienza* came to be seen as an insufficient practice. De Lauretis explains: "the relatively privatized practice of autocoscienza could not fulfil the need for immediate political effectivity in the larger world that was the goal of the movement [...] nor could it promote the public recognition of feminism as a critical analysis of society and culture" (De Lauretis 1990: 7). De Lauretis' statement is from the introductory essay to the book by the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* titled *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (1987). Indeed, the *Libreria delle Donne* was one of the many actors in the movement that felt the need to move on to other practices⁷² which either fostered

⁷² They write in the collective volume *Non credere di avere dei diritti*: "Actually, by now the practice of autocoscienza was producing a feeling of impotence for the simple reason that it had exhausted its potential. It was a limited political practice which could not be prolonged after it succeeded in making women conscious of being a separate sex, a sex neither subordinate nor assimilable to the male. It had removed woman's difference from the position of being spoken (by others), and had put her in the position of speaking for herself. Problems and contradictions grew out of this practice which the practice itself could not deal with, much less, solve. Its very way of working – women listening to each other tell about feelings and events they had experienced in common – was limited. It was fascinating, by virtue of the fascinating discovery of her own self which each woman made in the mirror that was her fellow woman. There was certainly no hint of boredom or feeling of impotence in that act of discovery.

deeper personal inquiry (for example, the practice of the unconscious) or had a more concrete impact on the social sphere, such as the creation of feminist organisations following the ‘practice of doing’ (Boccia 1990: 192; cf. the analysis of this practice in chapter 5).

In contrast, Carla Lonzi and her group continued to explore *autocoscienza* as a productive practice which they saw as representing the material conditions for generating ideas, namely ideas understood as a new form, a different epistemology. Maria Luisa Boccia stresses that it would be mistaken to judge the impact of *autocoscienza* by looking at the timeframe in which it was adopted by collectives. Rather, its meaning and value lies in its productive effect: this practice permeated the movement with the idea of “departing from oneself” as a way of thinking. In other words, it opened

The very possibility of formulating female subjectivity and thought starting from the concrete experiences and from the self of every woman. Without the deep and widespread acquisition of this original practice, feminism would have been remained just an ideology [...] and it would not have profoundly impacted society, changing ideas, subjects, relations. (Boccia 1990: 195)

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have highlighted some elements useful to contextualise Italian feminism, part of Second Wave Feminism. I tried to outline the main characteristics of the Italian feminist movement through an overview of four of its first groups. DEMAU, the first documented group, allowed an exemplification of the debate among movement participants over the distinction between emancipation and liberation

Something new, not repetition, had to follow a discovery to keep it alive” (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 45).

and the case of *Anabasi* offers evidence of the historical connection between American and Italian feminism, while Trento-based *Cerchio Spezzato* explicates both Italian feminism's roots in the 1968 movements and the influence of the Black Liberation Movement. In 1970, the examples of American groups spread in Italy thanks not only to *Anabasi*, but also to a series of seminars held by the Radical Party that resulted in the foundation of the MLD, characterised by a refusal of the separatism chosen by the small groups. *Rivolta Femminile* women were among the participants at these seminars. This group exemplifies the link between the practice of *autocoscienza* and separatism, connected to a way of practicing politics epitomised by the divergent political strategies the groups adopted on the terrain of abortion law.

I have also provided an overall periodisation of the lifecycle of the feminist movement in Italy and identified some key events leading up to 1976, the moment in which collectives as the predominant organising mode and feminism as a widespread, mass movement started to fade. The periodisation I have presented is not intended to suggest that feminism died out after the Eighties, but scholars substantially agree in identifying a change in terms of both the visibility and distribution of the movement, and the political strategies it adopted. Feminism did not disappear after that period, but its form did substantially change.

The next chapter continues the story from 1975, the year that marks the birth of *pratica del fare* (the 'practice of doing'), a particularly interesting feminist practice for studies in organising, that involved setting up Women's Houses, bookstores, libraries and documentation centres.

Chapter 5

The feminist ‘practice of doing’

A necessary personal transformation is co-substantial with a possible societal transformation.¹

This chapter uses an analysis of archival material (leaflets, presentations, communications) concerning soon-to-be-founded or newly-founded feminist organisations to delve into the idea of the ‘practice of doing’, an expression signalling a feminist practice devoted to organising emerging in the second half of the Seventies in Italy. An introductory section (5.1) presents the concept of *practice* in feminist theory. This will help in analytically introducing the core of the chapter, devoted to narrating the main events constituting the notion of ‘practice of doing’.

Examples of feminist practices include *autocoscienza* (“consciousness raising”), *partire da sé*, (“departing from oneself”), *affidamento* (“entrustment”), *disparità* (“disparity”) and other practices the meaning and content of which will be treated in different degrees of depth in this dissertation. Here, I present the practice of *autocoscienza*, already introduced in terms of its historical context in chapter 4, as it is the first and most foundational practice of feminism; this presentation will allow me to pinpoint some key features common to the notion of practice in the Italian feminist tradition. Given this study’s interest in organising, the core of the chapter will then be devoted to the *pratica del fare*.

¹ Leaflet *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*, 1976, consulted at ALM at FB, Milan (3.1. B. 20, F. 8) and ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 20, F. 8). The text will be published in Sottosopra (1976a).

Specifically, section 5.2 introduces this practice by explicating how physical space has been a key element in the constitution of feminist organisations. Section 5.3 presents the events surrounding the set-up and first years of running the feminist journal *Sottosopra*: the discussions among newsroom members provide an initial example of how political agenda and organisational issues have been intertwined in the projects of feminist collectives. These discussions constitute the grounds on which the *pratica del fare* came to be defined. The subsequent section (5.4) presents a 1976 text “Time, Means, Spaces” that codifies the tenets of the ‘practice of doing’. Setting up physical spaces is presented as a necessary shift in women’s politics. Women’s oppression occurs at different levels; thus, feminist politics should operate not only at a theoretical level, they should also enter into the social sphere via concrete entrepreneurial endeavours. The final section presents the story of setting up a feminist publishing house, *La Tartaruga*, used as an example of one of the organisations born in the historical moment of the ‘practice of doing’.

5.1 Conceptualising practices in Italian feminism

Since feminism begins at home, so to speak, as a collective reflection on practice, on experience, on the personal as political, and on the politics of subjectivity, a feminist theory exists as such only insofar as it refers and constantly comes back to these issues (De Lauretis 1987: 567).

The word *practice* assumes a dual meaning in my work. Practices are not only the set or organised doings and sayings processually constituting the organisation I am looking at, they are also a crucial feature of Italian feminism (Dominijanni 2010; De Lauretis 1990). One of the main characteristics of this philosophical orientation is that of having produced a set of practices embodying the political,

philosophical and symbolic dimensions of the movement. The new ideas proposed were always accompanied by new expressions (theoretical work) and new actions (political work) and *vice versa*, as reflections often stemmed from activities as well. Teresa De Lauretis conceptualises this relationship as: a theory of sexual difference composed of philosophical concepts articulating it (genealogy, symbolic mother, female freedom, female subject, etc.) that are grounded in original feminist practices which are in turn granted formal expression by theory (*autocoscienza*, entrustment, disparity, female relations) (De Lauretis 1990: 13).

Ida Dominijanni underlines that the centrality of practice could be better understood by contextualising the rise of Italian feminism and politics and the birth of women as subjects that constituted a paradigm shift in the political and social arena.

Under the slogan “the personal is political”, the female *presa di parola* broke into the public sphere, introducing a huge set of experiences and materialities that had been unrecognised or repressed by official political language: body, sexuality, affects, desires, fantasies, fears. The unconscious and sexual difference together gave the bill to the neutral, abstract, sovereign and rationalist individual of modern political anthropology. It wasn’t only a question of pulling down the distinction of public and private that grounded Western politics, nor merely of introducing sexist power in the map of power’s microphysics or of listing women in the catalogue of the oppressed. The question was a jump in the very form of political rationality. New practices and new forms of agency were required to mobilize subjectivity (Dominijanni 2010: 171).

Dominijanni uses *presa di parola* to refer to the fundamental feminist practice of *autocoscienza*. Following Maria Luisa Boccia’s perspective on the relevance of *autocoscienza* practice and its influence on later theoretical developments and principles such as “departing from

oneself”² – which can be understood as the methodological principle derived from *autocoscienza* – in this chapter I present a reading of some key elements of this practice that will span across the text to offer a more general outline of some key elements of practice in Italian feminism.

The first element of *autocoscienza* is spatial: the practice entailed narrating oneself and one’s own experiences shared in a women-only relational setting, so-called “small groups”. These groups formed the mental, psychological and physical space in which women were able to open up to relationships with other women, through an act that is already a kind of detachment from themselves (Boccia 1990; Bracke 2014a). Despite the prefix “auto-”, therefore, this practice did not involve an individualistic act of telling about oneself³, but rather a

² I am indebted to Prof. Linda Bertelli for the reflection that follows and the work of translating the expression *partire da sé* from the Italian to English. Linda Bertelli led me in the exercise of thinking together about these issues on the occasion of our preparation for the 8th International Conference of Feminist Studies at Paris Nanterre, August 2018 (8^{ème} Congrès International des Recherches Féministes dans la Francophonie; table ronde «*Partir de soi-même*»: *comment est-ce qu’on le fait aujourd’hui? Les défis du féminisme italien*). Other translations are offered by Patricia Cicogna and Teresa De Lauretis who, in their English translation of the seminal book *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990), referred to this practice as “starting with oneself” (134). Historian Maud Anne Bracke translates the practice as “starting from oneself” (Bracke 2014a: 19-20). In order to stress more forcefully the relational feature of the practice we have decided to adopt the word “departing”. In so doing, we in some ways adopt the suggestion made by Luisa Muraro’s essay *Partire da sé e non farsi trovare*, published in the 1996 Diotima book, *La sapienza di partire da sé*.

³ *Autocoscienza* can be literally translated as self-consciousness. De Lauretis 1990: 6 argues that this term “suggests something of an auto-induced, self-determined or self-directed process of achieving consciousness”.

common, relational exercise in which the presence of other women was crucial, as each participant both talked about herself and listens. The act of speaking authentically was related to the recognition of other women as subjects. Within the groups, as *Rivolta Femminile* puts it in 1972, “women recognise one another as complete human beings”.⁴ Therefore, such a process was also fundamental to the constitution of a new and unexpected consciousness, that of a woman who is recognised by another woman. As Carla Lonzi wrote in a private letter to a friend:

I don't know the difference between psychoanalysis and *autocoscienza* among women; I am familiar only with the latter. I believe that the most important element is trusting that the other wants you to be yourself. To find this other is the crucial thing.⁵

It is exactly the relational dimension that allowed the subject to be articulated not in terms of fixed identities or “what” categories, but to emerge as contextual. In other words, notes philosopher Adriana Cavarero,

the relational setting produces the meaning of the self and prevents the common identity from becoming a static figure with an exclusive identification. Because of its complete externality, its existing only in the face-to-face relationship, such a self is in fact continually re-definable in other shared settings. [...] The who exposing herself in these settings appears again and again to other women and shows, here and now, the meaning of her

⁴ Rivolta Femminile (1972). *Significato dell'autocoscienza nei gruppi femministi*, in Lonzi, C. (2010b): 119.

⁵ Letter to Gabriella Kristeller, 26th March 1972, quoted in Lonzi and Jaquinta 1985: 35. The English translation is mine.

personal identity in so far as it is unique and unrepeatable.
(Cavarero 2002a: 101)

In this setting “the unforeseeable meaning of the existing being is at stake” (Cavarero 2002a: 101).

Consequently, the process of speaking or “telling” about oneself was not only an “exploration of womanhood” (Bracke 2014a:66) with all the political themes related to the ability to construct a common political consciousness about bodies and subjectivities, it can be also read as an exercise in free speech, envisaging the linguistic element of practice. *Autocoscienza* is a relational bodily practice that also entails a search for a new language to signify experience. Luisa Muraro talks about *autocoscienza* in these terms: “a strategy invented to fight against the imposition of starting from what others had established as being truthful and right” (Muraro 1996: 13).⁶ In fact, this practice constituted a sort of learning process in which women began to consider their own experiences and words as reliable, and therefore supported the act of assuming the authority to speak.

Finally, this practice, based on lived experience, entails the discovery of a new epistemic process and is the grounds on which feminist reflection about situated and experiential knowledge might flourish. As the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective wrote, “this practice left women’s minds with an enduring delight in reasoning while remaining in contact with perceptible reality, and with the ability to use that contact with reality to elaborate theoretical thought” (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 46).

⁶ In her essay, Muraro was talking about the practice of *partire da sé* and the expression reported above was addressed in the context of explaining the motives that led to the invention of the practice. Thus, it is an expression that holds true for *autocoscienza*, which as I have said is the antecedent, context and space in which the methodology of *partire da sé* could be defined.

I once again borrow from Muraro to summarise this perspective, which holds true for both *autocoscienza* and the practice of “departing from oneself” and entails a link between the sphere of symbolic production and the sphere of political praxis that cannot be separated.

The main finding of this practice consists in going back to the source of the act of thinking and taking decisions, through the undoing of the set of what has been already thought out and decided. [...] By doing that, what we can find out is the subject – namely the living me – that is not in the subject position, but it is at another case: I can find myself in relationship with others. [...] It is a practice of displacement of the Self [...] that leads to the discarding of the subject without undoing it in a myriad of uncoordinated instances. This practice unravels myself into the relationships that make me who I am and become who I would like to be, yet it cannot allow me to lay on this being and becoming (Muraro 1996: 20).

After this overview of the practice of *autocoscienza* and the associated ‘methodological process’ of “departing from oneself”, I will outline some key features common to the different practices.

Overall, practices function as the *figuration* of a new social order in which new ideas, new languages, and new material arrangements take form together. Even though the linguistic dimension is obviously of crucial importance in practice, the sphere of symbolic production and political praxis are not divided. Dominijanni explains that “practice is neither theory’s younger sister nor a means subordinate to an end nor the concrete verification of an abstract ideal. It is [...] a *cut* in the established social-symbolic order, a cut that opens a space in which it is possible to publicly act and speak of what is repressed, forbidden or disavowed” (Dominijanni 2010: 171).

Introducing the “disavowed” in the discourse involves bringing to the fore of the discussion what had been considered unpolitical or pre-political, for example experiences, feelings, and forms of silence. The idea of *pensiero dell’esperienza* relates to this point in that it signals a kind of posture in which, always measured by the presence and relation of others, one tries to give credit to that which exceeds language (and yet can be spoken). Practices are therefore political in the sense that they aim to modify society. They are collectively bound together in a relational context where the reciprocal recognition of women as subject of the discourse is of crucial importance. As Muraro puts it “practice is the voluntary exercise that engages the being a body (the spacetime) in the symbolic independence of the person. Practice is political (and not ascetical) when it involves many people in the battleground (which is also an interior one) against the pervasiveness of power” (Muraro 2014: 143). Finally, practices are forms of effort that cannot exist without a practicing subject. The modification of society is intertwined with the possibility of modifying the self: “it is a significant and performative act, which simultaneously modifies the person who performs it and the context in which it is performed” (Dominijanni 2010: 171). Italian feminist philosopher Angela Putino fruitfully used Foucault’s analysis of the care of the self in Greek antiquity “in the manner of annotations” to comment on what Italian feminist movements had said and done, specifically to frame the key practice of *partire da sé*. Putino’s translation into Foucaultian concepts is also useful to frame this idea of practices as political and linguistic projects activated only in presence of a personal transformation as parrhesiastic exercises in giving an account of the relationship between one’s own *bios* and *logos* (Putino 1996).

5.2 Defining the ‘practice of doing’

In 1975, the feminist movement had reached its apex in Italy and, as mentioned in chapter 4, was entering a phase of decline in terms of the

quantity and scope of mass participation (cf. Di Cori 2012; Giachetti 2005; Paolucci 1987). At the same time, 1975 was also a crucial year for Italian feminism as it marks the birth of what has been called “the practice of doing” (*la pratica del fare*).⁷ This expression refers to the fact that feminist groups in this period started to imagine and set up activities such as publishing houses, documentation centres, bookshops, and libraries. The aforementioned endeavours, ways of grounding political action in the present, were connected to different kinds of production in the cultural sphere (Sapegno 2011, Cutrufelli et al. 2001).⁸ Anne Maude Bracke explains that these spaces functioned as

⁷ This expression can be found in the collective volume *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (1987), which can be considered a primary source for this issue as it is a retrospective narration of some key events in Italian feminism made by women participating in the movement (cf. chapter 7 for an analysis of the text). Further research is needed to understand if there are earlier accounts that use this expression. The expression is also used by secondary sources: Bracke 2014a: 78 does not quote the bibliographic source. Historian Maria Milagro Rivera Garretas 1998: 145 cites the *pratica del fare* not in a historical review but rather gives a theoretical interpretation to the expression. Rivera Garretas sees the *pratica del fare*, defined as the movement of generating theory starting from political practice, as the connective ground for the “figures”, as the historian defines them, of maternal genealogy, *affidamento* and female authority (stemming from sexual difference practice). De Vita 2009 reflects on her social entrepreneurship project as belonging to the genealogy of *pratica del fare*, intended as the moment of constituting “groups devoted to building something up”.

⁸ This study focuses on Italian New Feminism (Bracke 2014a) creations in the cultural realm; therefore, the analysis excludes numerous other interesting endeavours in the socio-political sphere. For example, other important projects were engaged in the health and medical sphere, with self-managed clinics, connected (again, in the peculiar movement between theory and practice) to “health groups” and “self-help” practice. Influential for this kind of practice was the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective text *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973), received in Italy thanks to Angela Miglietti’s translation (Bracke 2014b:

a middle ground between the politics of self-reflection and traditional male politics as practiced by movements and extra-parliamentary groups. In her analyses, Bracke thus conceptualises these efforts as alternative ways of institutionalising women's politics (Bracke 2014a: 190-1), even though her overall understanding of Italian feminist politics appears to me to be polarised in terms of conceptualising politics as only occurring in the active and public sphere, labelling other initiatives, for example cultural ones, as interested in the 'existential' dimension.⁹

8) and, after circulating as a text in the movement, published by Feltrinelli (1974) as *Noi e il nostro corpo*. For a focus on this kind of experiences in the Roman context, cf. Bracke 2014a: 98-121. After the birth of the region-based public counselling (Law n. 405 of 29 July 1975), independent women's councils began to disappear (Lussana 2012: 85)

The "150 hours courses" represented another key activity. This adult educational program was devoted to workers, who, according to *Statuto dei Lavoratori* norms, could allocate 150 hours of leave to furthering their education (Bracke 2014a: 159; Sapegno 2011: 168). Within this context, numerous educational programs were devoted to feminist themes and issues, held by feminist activists and researchers. "The 150 hours classes probably contributed more than any other initiative to turning feminism into a cultural revolution touching women across classes and ages" (Bracke 2014a: 139- 40).

Another sphere that differs from the practice of "small groups" by virtue of its institutional affiliation and political paradigms is that of Trade Union Feminism (for a rich overview of the topic cf. Lussana 2012: 112-50; for a focus on the Turin-based group *Intercategoriale* cf. Bracke 2014a: 126-51; for a reflection on the relations between feminism and trade unions workers cf. Mecozzi 1989: 272-83) and the *Lotta Femminista* group, devoted to the study of labour dynamics and the battle for salaried housework.

⁹ Throughout her book, which is very informative, Bracke substantially divides the groups she categorises as either "political" or "existential", thus suggesting she understands there to be a dichotomy or impossibility to read "existential" feminist stances and research as political. In this context, the cultural places formed are seen as a sort of compromise between *autocoscienza* and public

Some examples of the first of these creations (1975-1980) are the *Libreria delle Donne* and the publishing house *La Tartaruga*, both founded in 1975 in Milan, the publishing house *Edizioni delle Donne* (Rome, 1975), the Beato Angelico Artists' Cooperative in Rome (1976),¹⁰ the Virginia Woolf Cultural Centre in Rome (1979), and the Women's Library in Parma (1980), among many other initiatives blossoming in that period. Although some editorial products, such as magazines, were already active since 1973,¹¹ it should be noted that editorial production through publishing houses, women's bookshops, libraries and other centres blossomed between 1975 and the Eighties. Women's Houses were already forming in the Seventies, but they were more fully expanded and consolidated in the Eighties. This decade also witnessed the birth of archival and documentation centres and anti-violence centres.¹²

I luoghi delle femministe e la pratica del movimento is a 1975 collective reflection on the connection between movement practices and the

action. Existential transformation and social movement or impact are understood as positioned along a polarised *continuum*.

¹⁰ Composed by the feminist artists who left the *Rivolta Femminile* group (cf. Serravalli 2013 and Zapperi 2017).

¹¹ Feminist magazines or independent publications were active before 1975 (cf. Appendix n.3) and only beginning in 1975 were they organised in a more structured way, through publishing houses. *Rivolta Femminile* and *Edizioni di Rivolta*, already founded in 1970 (cf. chap. 4), constitute an exception.

¹² Appendix n.3 lists some of the cultural activities that emerged in the Seventies and Eighties. For a review of organisations in the Italian panorama cf. Jourdan 2010 (DVD and leaflet accompanying «Via Dogana» 94 (2010)). For lists of groups and activities in the Milan panorama, cf. Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985] (especially p. 24). Cf. also Bono and Kemp 1991: 368-69 for a table of women's centres.

spaces hosting them.¹³ The authors of this piece¹⁴ state that, given the fact that the key tenet of feminist politics is women's histories, bodies, experiences and relationships with one another, there is a pressing need to establish spaces in which to meet and cultivate the social life of groups.

That is why the 'places' where women meet, get to know each other, think and act, require our careful, accurate (even lengthy) attention. It would be unapt for such needs to think about a mere location for the meetings. A reflection upon the places we spent time in, shows how there has never been the realisation of a 'headquarter', that is to say a single, centralising meeting space; rather, on the contrary, our practice has been a complex, scattered one – so much so that we don't even know how many of us are here in Milan.

They then proceed to list the places used up to that point (the *Società Umanitaria* and *Via Cherubini*, places where the various small groups were meeting all together). At that point, however, they realise that the dominant typology of meeting space has been "the combination of our own private spaces: comfortable homes, well-equipped by the owners, freely at disposal for the group".

The text shows a progressive understanding of the need for a structure that was neither the private home nor the "headquarters",

¹³ Document consulted at ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 8.

¹⁴ The byline is mysterious and tautological: "quelle che hanno discusso della sede e dei luoghi delle femministe, in Via Cherubini", that translates into "those who discussed about the headquarters and about feminists' spaces, in Via Cherubini." The document held at ALM bears an (*ex post*) comment by the philosopher, who has circled the byline in the pencil and written, in italics, "what a funny byline!".

something impersonal, not taken care of,¹⁵ and thus documents a changing approach to aggregation, shifting away from the private homes where meetings and practices had been developing up to 1975 (cf. Lussana 2012: 167; Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987: 89).

There is therefore an idea of passage from a word-based practice that takes place in the private sphere, to a practice deploying more varied modes of expressions aimed at realising concrete spaces in which to carry out politics and research in the public sphere.¹⁶

It would, however, be wrong to understand the ‘practice of doing’ as separation, as moving *beyond* the dimension of language. Firstly, because the sphere of language continues to be central: the efforts undertaken after 1975, in fact, sought to promote contemporary feminist thought (through magazines and other editorial endeavours, publishing houses), disseminate (through women’s libraries and bookstores), and preserve (through archival and documentation centres) the intellectual production of women from the past. Secondly, because the practice of doing can be understood as a testing grounds for the theories and practices developed up to that point, as the passage below shows:

¹⁵ Cf. the documental analysis in Calabrò and Grasso 2004 [1985]: 79. The critique of the idea of “headquarters”, seen as similar to the ‘traditional’ and masculine modalities of political action, is not shared by the feminist movement as a whole. Cf. Lussana 2012: 89, who analyses in this light the battles for proper headquarters leading to the occupation of the *Leoncavallo* social centre by the *Avanguardia Operaia* women and other Milanese collectives, in 1975.

¹⁶ On the evolution from orality to writing, and from writing to material creations, cf. also Lussana 2012: 86; Di Cori 2012: 40; and De Lauretis 1990: 7-8.

That was how the so-called practice of doing among women began. It derived, we said, from the practice of relations between women and was a specific instance of it. [...] Things are not like words; things occupy a limited space and time, leaving some space and time open to do yet other things. And in the process of doing, desire can assert itself with the greatest determination without denying the possibility of other desires, other choices. The political meaning of that doing, nonetheless, could not do without speech. [...] There were, in fact, women and groups who entrusted the significance of their doing to things they were doing. But more often it was understood that doing, and all it brought to life, should be open to reflection so as to transform experience into knowledge. Besides, the objects of that doing, such as libraries, bookstores, publishing houses, centres for documentation, suffice to show that what was at stake was not so much this or that enterprise but a need or desire for mastery of language. (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 81-2)

This passage suggests that the *locus* for gaining knowledge from experience was the act (what they call "the doing") while the content of the endeavour (what they call "the objects of the doing") was read as important because of its connection to the sphere of language. The idea that the dimension of practice is of utmost importance can also be seen in a document held at the Luisa Muraro Archive written by *Casa Editrice delle Donne* di Roma.¹⁷ In this document, the founding group

¹⁷ The *Casa Editrice delle Donne* ("Women's Publishing House") was founded in 1975 in Rome by Anne Marie Boetti, Manuela Fraire, Elisabetta Rasy, and Maria Caronia. The *Edizioni delle Donne* published a text that is interesting for this inquiry: *L'Almanacco. Luoghi, nomi, incontri, lavori in corso del movimento femminista italiano dal 1972*, a volume that clearly expresses the turmoil of the period, characterised by the emergence of numerous experiences. The book (Fraire, M. et al. 1978) is particularly interesting as it consists of an effort to present the status of the movement and its activities. The title itself reads "The Almanac. Places, Names, Encounters, Work in Progress of the Italian Feminist

reflects on how to organise an endeavour, that of publishing, that they conceived as a specific political tool with the power to give voice to the

Movement from 1972". Dating to 1978, it gives an interesting indication about what experiences the group and movement deemed relevant (*Pratica e esperienze*, groups and collectives; *Il nostro corpo*, health and sexuality collectives and activities; *Noi e il lavoro*, excerpts of texts and conferences on labour issues as well as groups and collectives active in the field; *Scuola*, "The School"; *Luoghi di incontro*, "meeting spaces"; *I nostri Libri*, "Our Books"; *La nostra informazione*, a list of the main informative tools, mainly journals or fanzines of the movement; *Segni visivi*, a section devoted to visual arts; *Canzoni*, a section devoted to music or events; *Teatro*, "Theatre"). The book is particularly interesting as, although it is dedicated to showing the variety of the movement's creations, it also reflects critically upon the risk of obliterating smaller, less fully-formed and yet equally crucial initiatives. From the introduction by Manuela Fraire, Rosalba Spagnoletti, and Marina Virdis: "This Almanac is everything that is not. Namely, it is what is left as more visible of the many realities of the feminist movement and it is not instead (and maybe it could not have been) the mirror of the movement. Therefore there might be the risk that the organised realities have took too much space, perhaps giving the impression of being also the most important, while we all know that the realities that are less visible and less traceable are the real connective tissue of the movement." The book offers also an interesting gaze on the turmoil of the period, as its pages feature announcements by soon-to-be-founded centres asking for materials, offering information or simply writing to communicate their existence. For example, *Librellula*, Bologna Women's Bookstore, writes to let the movement know about their project and ask for dialogue and collaboration; *Isis* ("International Informational Service") in Rome, a counter-information and documentation project, introduces itself, asking for materials and offering a platform for visibility for other groups; a collective from Teramo (Abruzzo) asks for contributions (materials, information) to establish a documentation centre; the soon-to-be-founded *Centro di Diffusione e Documentazione Femminista* in Catania (Sicily) offers to provide materials and information on feminist and class struggle-related issues; finally, the Lecce Independent Library announces its opening. The publication closes with a comprehensive list of the Italian groups and collectives, with addresses and contact information.

feminist movement and women's intellectual production as well as to counter-attacking the assimilation of feminist issues, which were being increasingly incorporated into the agendas of (non-feminist) publishers.

The document states:

The Edizioni delle Donne stems from an initiative of four feminist from Rome, coming from militancy in the feminist collective Via Pomponazzi and Maddalena-libri. The project emerges from the need of tackling, 'in practice', the theme, still relevant, of feminine creativity and of keeping on and disseminating the status of the struggle of women as a new 'political subject'. Namely, we want to propose the two aspects of the same process of individuation and creation of female's autonomy:

- Research of the organisational forms that are necessary to individual and social identity,
- Recognition of the moment when women's struggle becomes culture and the specific women's culture becomes the struggle.

It is in this sense that publishing activity has to be understood as part of feminist practice and militancy, and not as mere "publishing on women".¹⁸

¹⁸ Untitled text by *Casa Editrice delle Donne*, Rome. ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 8. The document is undated, but given the tone, similar to a statement of intentions, it is likely a very early communication by the group. Also, the document closes with a list of the first texts to be published ("I primi testi in programma ci sembra esemplificino il nostro progetto"); since the first published text was in 1976 (Re and Derossi 1976), it is possible to date the document to 1975. The text was later published, in a slightly modified version, for the 1978 *Almanacco delle Edizioni delle Donne* (Fraire, M. et al. 1978: 101-02).

The publishing house is suggesting their enterprise be read through a political lens, in virtue not only of their specific object – feminist books – but also of their organisational practices, an expression and a phase of feminist politics rather than merely a specialised publishing company. In fact, the document goes on to criticise those editors who have appropriated the feminist agenda to exploit its appeal in the contemporary editorial market and, in doing so, have integrated and neutralised feminist works in their catalogues under the label *questione femminile*:

Studies, analyses, inquiries that are not tangent with the movement, as they are constructed from the above and from the outside, and that tend to, trivialising and segmenting our themes, to disperse and minimise the subversive scope of women's movement.

The point here is that the political connotations of the enterprise are guaranteed by its organisational approach: selling feminist books is not enough to make one a feminist actor; the discriminant lies in the dimension of practice. It is the interconnection between “the doing” and “the objects of doing” in the organisation as a whole that provides the material signal that women are present and speaking in the public sphere.

5.3 Early endeavours grounding the ‘practice of doing’: the example of the feminist publication *Sottosopra*

Looking at some early practical endeavours, such as the publication of periodicals, helps us understand the grounds on which the *pratica del fare* developed. A key example is the independent publication *Sottosopra*, “Upside Down”. A passage from the journal's first issue

(*Esperienze dei gruppi Femministi in Italia*, 1973), explaining the social and educational influence in reiterating women constraints, seems to allude to a possible interpretation of the journal title as well as its manifesto: women overturning the *status quo*.

We are educated to be patient and neat, to make and remake the same things, and to do them following the rules; we are raised to keep things tidy and even to educate to tidiness as to avoid that we get the idea of overturning everything. (Sottosopra 1973)

Sottosopra was run by different national groups, and up to 1976 it reflected on issues that were key for the movement as a whole, such as the question of abortion and its lawful regulation (cf. chapter 4), and in 1976 *Sottosopra* published what came to be considered the seminal text of the *pratica del fare*, which I will examine below. After six years of silence, from 1983 onwards it became a key political publication of the *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano, published occasionally when the *Libreria* group felt the need to develop key political currents of thought, proposals, or ideas and open these to public debate (cf. chapter 7 for an overview of *Libreria delle Donne's Sottosopra* journal). For the purposes of this study, it is particularly interesting to analyse not only the *Sottosopra* issues and their thematic foci but also and especially the documents produced inside the group as part of preparing the issues, documents which were shared among those working for the journal. These documents are testimony to the process of formulating and – through reflections, problems and debates – defining the *pratica del fare*.

The key tenets of the journal's first phase (1973-1976)¹⁹ are stated in the *documento programmatico*²⁰ explaining the publication's

¹⁹ Table 6 in chapter 7 lists all the *Sottosopra* publications with titles and themes. A key publication on the history of *Sottosopra* is Paolozzi and Leiss 1999. For a discussion of the writing methodology of *Sottosopra*, exemplifying the

political line, defined as “women’s expressive channel”. This channel was to be open to all women and free of censorship, that is to say, it was designed to accept all “political lines, ideas and expressive forms”.²¹ The document also speaks to the way the publication was collectively run, without divisions among role, for both economic and political reasons: since printing is a costly activity and “we all are working hard for our own economic independence”:

We all have to deal with these difficulties and experience personally what it means to be able to create the possibility of having our own press. That is why there can’t be a separation of roles among who writes, who composes materially the journal number, who distributes it, but, on the contrary, these three moments are inseparable (and they are part of our political practice)”.²²

The document goes on to propose a possible format: each city would take a turn being responsible for printing. The designated city should communicate the printing days one month in advance so that the women writing the articles could travel there from their own cities and

relationship between theory and practice in women’s politics, cf. Fanciullacci 2016.

²⁰ *Comunicato programmatico sul “Sottosopra”*, typewritten text, two pages, with no name or date (ALD at FB, Milan, section “Sottosopra”, 1974-1975, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3).

²¹ It is interesting to note that freedom and the absence of censorship was actually limited to group type. In fact, in the document they say they will not accept contributions and materials from mixed or extra-parliamentary groups.

²² *Comunicato programmatico sul “Sottosopra”*, typewritten text, two pages, with no name or date (ALD at FB, Milan, section “Sottosopra”, 1974-1975, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3). The underlined part appears in the original document.

help with layout, bringing with them the money that had already been collected. The text closes with a justification of this proposed method:

Of course it is always unpleasant to talk about money, but there is nothing that is going to suppress it any soon, and we do think that a way to verify the benefit of printing an article on the political practice that made it possible is that who is aware of it, who approves it, knows where and how it can spark interest.

For its first number, therefore, the journal appears to be a movement-wide platform for expression, each time presenting the work of a different collective that is also in charge of the content and technical side of producing the issue. Problems began to arise among the groups right after the first publication, however. A text dated January 1974 (and thus after the first number, published in 1973) reflects on the current situation of the publication and the urgent need to put out another number as well as encouraging other groups to participate more actively.²³ The women who are writing, part of the Milanese groups,²⁴ open the communiqué by saying:

Dear Comrades, for sure you have seen, read or contributed to “Sottosopra”. We are writing you in order to make a second number. In the editorial of the first number we were saying how

²³ Typewritten text, two pages, with no name, dated 18th January 1974 and sent from Milan. In ALD at FB it is labelled as “Proposta di pubblicazione del secondo numero” (1.1. B. 1, F. 3).

²⁴ The document is signed “quelle di ‘Sottosopra’ n.1 + molte altre per il ‘Sottosopra’ n.2.”, the letter closes with “inviate al solito indirizzo”, and then the Milan address of Giordana Masotto is provided (ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3, “Proposta di pubblicazione del secondo numero”). Journalist Giordana Masotto has been the first librarian of the bookstore.

we felt the need to collect and publish the experiences made and to create a platform for debate and connection among groups. This proposal still seems very valid to us. The first number of “*Sottosopra*” has received the sympathy of many, but only few women from Milan have given active contribution to its making.

The group first proposes that some reflexive articles and comments on the idea of the publication itself, its problem, and its organisational issues be included in the new number. Then, they continue by saying that *Sottosopra* is a publication by and for the entire movement, and there is evidence that it is appreciated and loved, given the number of contributions and because, once printed, the journal had been enthusiastically distributed by every group in every city; moreover, the first copies to be produced were already sold out. What they bemoaned, however, was that the burden of creating the journal fell wholly on the shoulders of the *gruppo del giornale*, which was obliged out of necessity to form a newsroom even though doing so went against the initial agenda: “somehow it was a compromise because in the initial idea there was not a newsroom, as to say, a power group in the movement.”²⁵ The idea of operating without a *redazione* (that is to say, of a group of people specifically in charge of doing certain tasks and making decisions) was meant to signal not only that “there is no power group” in the movement, but also that this organisational decision was “part of our political practice”: those who write should also take responsibility for the material aspects. This was understood as a “moment of testing” (*verifica*), as a chance to gauge the

²⁵ I could not retrieve information on the exact number of communications shared among the movement in this phase nor the exact time that the Milanese *gruppo per il giornale* spent waiting for answers, before taking the decision of establishing a newsroom. However, the communication on the decision to adopt a newsroom is dated 1974, and refers to the exigence of publishing issue number 2 of the journal. Therefore, the process of debate unraveled between the first publication of *Sottosopra* (1973) and the second one in 1974.

interest, motivation and political relevance of the effort. This is why the Milanese group is lamenting the fact that they ended up having to create a structure in which they functioned as a newsroom and the rest of the movement as contributors. The letter closes by stressing the group's hope that the production of the journal might become a shared labour and that, by receiving lots of documents, it will be possible to put together issue number 2 as well.

A second letter from the Milan group, dated May 1974, is completely devoted to economic issues: "Dears, we are here in six debating on very high costs and so you will understand if we go straight to the problem."²⁶ The problem was that *Sottosopra* number 2 was ready, and within 15 days the group had to deposit 1,000,000 liras to print it. They therefore needed to know how many copies the other groups were requesting. The distribution strategy of the last number relied on the Milanese women paying for copies and then reselling them, while "with the other cities the process was more ambiguous and difficult: there has been a deep relying upon Milan for economic issues [una forte delega economica a Milano]"²⁷. Such a strategy was no longer sustainable, they wrote. Rather, they proposed that each feminist buy 10 copies and take care of selling the remaining 9. Specifically, they suggest that each individual feminist buy the journal, but that feminist groups organise the process of collecting money and communicating to Milan the number of copies that are needed in each city.

In June 1975, the same Milanese *gruppo per il giornale* went on to produce another document, entitled *Scrivere, pubblicare, fare un giornale*,

²⁶ *Comunicato sull'organizzazione e i costi della pubblicazione*, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

*e la pratica politica del movimento*²⁸ In presenting the experience gained from publishing the first three issues, the text, which is reproduced in image 5, retraced the key tenets of the journal (an expressive medium for the whole movement, open to all women, collectively run without any divisions of roles, independently distributed) as well as the key issues (relations with the traditional press, financial constraints).

²⁸ *Scrivere, pubblicare, fare un giornale, e la pratica politica del movimento*, 1975. Signed “gruppo per il giornale” . Conserved at ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 7, and ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3. The document will be then published on *Almanacco delle Edizioni delle Donne*, together with other *Sottosopra* related texts, in 1978 (p. 116).

IMG. 5 – “Scrivere, pubblicare, fare un giornale, e la pratica politica del movimento”, June 1975, Milan ALM at FB, (3.1. B. 20, F. 7), and ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 1, F. 3). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione Badaracco, Milano.

SCRIVERE, PUBBLICARE, FARE UN GIORNALE E LA PRATICA POLITICA DELLE DONNE

Ci sembra che la nostra pratica politica si approfondisca sotto molti aspetti, e in particolare rispetto ai rapporti tra di noi, alla costruzione di consapevolezza, ai diversi mezzi espressivi che riscopriamo in noi - uno dei quali è la parola scritta.

Non abbiamo ancora abbastanza parlato della parola scritta che diventa libro, nonostante che molte donne (che si riconoscono o no nel movimento) abbiano scritto in questi ultimi anni libri che parlano di sé o delle donne o più astrattamente "della donna", e nonostante che i problemi implicati dallo scrivere e fare un libro siano tanti (la ricerca di una affermazione personale generalmente negata, il desiderio di lasciare un segno nella storia, il desiderio di esprimersi e comunicare, l'esporsi a elogi o critiche, l'usare un mezzo "definitivo", nero su bianco... il rapporto con gli editori...).

Abbiamo invece già usato assieme la parola scritta per fare un giornale - Sottosopra: un giornale del movimento, fatto da donne, rivolto alle donne.

Ne sono usciti tre numeri, nel '73, '74 e nel '75: i primi su tutti i diversi temi di cui ciascuna aveva desiderato scrivere e che aveva inviato per la pubblicazione, il terzo su sessualità, maternità, procreazione e aborto così come ne abbiamo parlato (e abbiamo potuto registrare) all'incontro di febbraio a Milano.

Dopo ogni numero di Sottosopra abbiamo cercato di discutere "in grande" del numero stesso, tra quelle che si erano prese l'iniziativa di "farlo partire" discutendone il modo, inviando lettere alle altre città e costruendolo materialmente; quelle che avevano inviato articoli; quelle che l'avevano letto o erano interessate. Queste discussioni "a prodotto finito" sono state quasi sempre difficili e poco fruttuose: sembrava che poche avessero letto, avessero pensato, avessero voglia di parlarne con altre; sembrava che l'uscita del giornale facesse piacere sì, ma fosse vissuta "alla lontana", con la stessa passività con cui subiamo l'uscita degli altri giornali ecc.

D'altra parte l'esperienza di Sottosopra è stata grossa per molte, ci convince ancora: in una decina abbiamo così portato avanti la discussione sulla pratica del movimento rispetto allo scrivere e al giornale.

Crediamo che si possa creare un più stretto rapporto tra:

il nostro tendenziale vederci più spesso, il discutere di più cose e più liberamente assieme, l'approfondire i rapporti tra di noi, il fare maggior riferimento e avere maggior fiducia nelle donne, il cercare le condizioni per vivere e lavorare in modo diverso dalla famiglia e dai luoghi di produzione e di politica tradizionali (ecc. ...) è difficile indicare esaurientemente la nostra pratica politica!

il modo dello scrivere, del costruire graficamente, del discutere e diffondere il giornale. Crediamo che esso possa diventare uno strumento e un'occasione stabile per questa pratica (così come le case, le "sedi", i consultori, la libreria, gli incontri...) anziché esserne la "foto di famiglia" epistodica e fissa: anzi crediamo che il vero giornale non sia tanto il prodotto finito che ad un certo punto circolerà stampato quanto il lavoro di trasformazione che mettiamo in atto verso noi stesse e da cui anche il giornale nasce.

Abbiamo fatto perciò alcune riflessioni che riguardano i nostri rapporti con la stampa tradizionale e la pratica politica dello scrivere e del pubblicare che abbiamo sperimentato con i primi tre numeri di Sottosopra.

Così, discutendo, ci sembra di aver trovato una strada proponibile per portare avanti il lavoro collettivo e critico, anche sulle cose che vengono scritte, tenendo conto di quelle discriminanti politiche che erano state operanti per i primi tre numeri di Sottosopra e che ora - in tre anni di crescita - è possibile e ripercuotere.

PRENDIAMO QUINDI UNA INIZIATIVA POLITICA NEL MOVIMENTO:

*formulare una proposta di incontri e di lavoro che rispetti queste discriminanti e che abbia dei momenti decisi e stabili per realizzarsi, perché tutte le interessate vi possano partecipare;

*registrare Sottosopra come testata presso il Tribunale di Milano (per ragioni storiche e perché da Milano parte questa iniziativa) come imposto dalle leggi sulla stampa se si vuol stampare più di un numero annuale.

Quando la nostra pratica supererà questa iniziativa, essa verrà chiusa in favore di iniziative migliori. Per ora, essa ci sembra frutto stimolante del desiderio e della pratica stessa di incontro e di confronto.

I nostri rapporti con la stampa.

Nonostante le costanti regolarissime scottature che ci prendiamo ogniqualvolta passiamo un'informazione, o

concediamo un'intervista o scriviamo un articolo per qualche giornale che (oggi...) spasima per pubblicare qualcosa sul femminismo, molte di noi ancora privilegiano la stampa - tradizionale e non - per parlare di noi donne e della nostra lotta, per comunicare, convincere, contestare.

Eppure la stampa (tutta la stampa) ci ignora, ci cerca, ci rispolvera, ci interpreta, ci descrive; come e quando vuole, secondo la logica che ha quel tal giornale, quella corrente, quel padrone.

L'aggiustamento che a volte abbiamo voluto portare all'articolo di un giornalista, ad una informazione, non ha mai cambiato il significato di fondo della pubblicazione, che è servire una ideologia: quella del giornale, del giornalista.

Mai appare l'esperienza pulita o l'intenzione rispettata di chi si trova dunque ad essere semplice pretesto della cosiddetta "informazione". La mala o buona fede del(la) giornalista non c'entrano; la logica comune di tutti i giornali, al di là delle mode culturali e delle specificazioni politiche di ognuno, è: difendere le istituzioni capitalistiche e la cultura del sistema o - nel caso dei giornali di sinistra - pur nell'attacco alle istituzioni, difenderne gli elementi patriarcali.

Abbiamo verificato che tutta la stampa di fatto porta avanti la difesa della sessualità così come si è storicamente determinata (cioè eterosessualità / normale / istituzionale - omosessualità / deviante / emarginata), della famiglia, della autorità maschile, della sostanziale subordinazione delle donne.

Quindi, al di là delle illusioni, o di occasionali tattiche che ci vedranno usare di quella stampa per divulgare momenti della nostra vita politica che si prestano ad una informazione superficiale, il solo mezzo di comunicazione scritta della nostra pratica che abbiamo con le donne, con le altre realtà politiche, con la stampa, è la **NO-STRA STAMPA**.

La pratica dello scrivere, l'esperienza dei primi Sottosopra e le discriminanti.

Sappiamo che stampare e scrivere è una soltanto delle nostre possibilità espressive e di comunicazione tra le donne. Un'espressione che presenta molti problemi per ogni singola donna e anche per la pratica collettiva che stiamo costruendo.

Per questo dobbiamo trovare un modo di procedere che ci dia la possibilità di affrontare questi problemi collettivamente; che ci stimoli tutte ad usare di questa espressione superando i limiti della scrittura individuale competitiva come ce l'hanno insegnata.

In questa ricerca i primi tre Sottosopra rappresentano un'importante esperienza da cui trarre frutto.

Sottosopra, come ogni iniziativa, ha espresso valori politici sia nelle scelte che sono state fatte prima della sua esistenza, quelle che di fatto gli hanno dato vita, sia nella verifica pratica di quelle scelte, nella realizzazione materiale che è ogni suo numero.

Alcuni di questi valori politici sono stati delle discriminanti per l'iniziativa, altri sono stati stimoli per una maturazione di ulteriori e più significativi chiarimenti per il proseguimento dell'iniziativa. Noi pensiamo che la nascita di discriminanti, se corrisponde ad una nascita di consapevolezza del movimento, di alcune di noi, sia un fatto positivo; è per noi che scriviamo un intento politico dichiarato.

Per i primi Sottosopra, il gruppo di donne che si riuniva per mettere assieme il giornale aveva la semplice pubblicazione e diffusione del materiale come obiettivo ultimo, e si era dato dei criteri discriminanti precisi per quanto riguarda le donne a cui rivolgere la proposta di pubblicazione del materiale:

- (se non erano donne in situazioni isolate) che facessero parte di gruppi non misti e non legati a gruppi extraparlamentari o a partiti (non quindi per esempio MLD, FILF, UDI).

Ai gruppi che conosceamo come tali abbiamo inviato la prima lettera d'invito a fare Sottosopra: questo è stato il modo, lo strumento con cui abbiamo reso operante questa prima discriminante che ci sembrava, e ci sembra tuttora per allora e per oggi, aderente alla pratica e alla vita del movimento.

Esistono oggi le tribune dei gruppi o partiti anche sulla "condizione femminile": noi non vogliamo essere la somma di queste tribune, né una tribuna, ma un canale di espressione delle donne.

In particolare il canale di stampa che vogliamo aprire alle donne è chiuso ai gruppi extraparlamentari, perché misti e quindi maschili. Questi gruppi necessariamente guardano alle donne con l'ottica politica loro propria, ancora una prevaricazione rispetto all'espressione di un punto di vista della donna sui suoi problemi; la politica tradizionale, cioè la pratica politica maschile, è il momento di maggiore sublimazione dell'esperienza maschile, della materialità maschile; per questo ci siamo sempre poste fuori e contro la politica tradizionale, per cercare di costruire un nuovo modo di fare politica che parta dalla materialità femminile.

Questa è certo una ricerca, le donne portano nella loro esperienza tutte le compromissioni e le contraddizioni, ma c'è una fondamentale diversità tra il portare in quanto donne, verificarle nella pratica del movimento delle donne, e il mantenere come interlocutore, quadro di riferimento, il movimento politico maschile.

la seconda discriminante riguardava i criteri di pubblicazione: avevamo deciso che si sarebbe pubblicato assolutamente tutto il materiale pervenuto da questi gruppi, senza nessuna censura ideologica, o di forma espressa o altro.

La proposta non partiva - come ora non parte - da un gruppo redazionale: abbiamo stimato di essere state fin troppo censurate e sottoposte a giudizi per riproporre tra di noi questi meccanismi; vogliamo invece liberarcene scoprendoli e affrontandoli là dove ancora si ripresentano, comprendendo a quali istanze fanno riferimento. Nessun numero di Sottosopra sarà perciò chiuso alle donne che vi vogliono partecipare, ma al contrario l'esistenza di un numero già avviato speriamo possa essere lo stimolo che dia coraggio ed entusiasmo a molte di noi per tirare le fila di un'esperienza, per diffondere con la parola scritta una sua riflessione ad altre donne, essere anche (per certe piccole città) la possibilità di uscire dal confronto, magari ristretto, del suo piccolo gruppo e trovare interlocutrici nello spazio più vasto che offrono le donne delle altre città.

La stessa cosa per la capacità organizzativa ed emotiva di stampare: le città più popolate, che presentano magari facilitazioni riguardo la stampa, serviranno di supporto per garantire nei numeri del giornale la presenza di quelle situazioni, di quelle donne, che rimarrebbero altrimenti emarginate.

Non esisterà censura (tutto verrà pubblicato) di linee politiche, idee, forme espressive, né mediazione tra la molteplicità delle idee politiche del movimento e l'informazione (in questo caso scritta) che ne diamo alle donne: la mediazione tra la realtà e l'informazione delle masse, nella stampa, è realizzata con pubblicazioni efficaci nel condizionare, con il bombardamento psicologico delle idee; secondo noi la pratica politica rivoluzionaria è quella di dare la possibilità ad ogni donna di riflettere "personalmente" su tutto ciò che il movimento esprime, a partire da se stessa e non da stimoli artificiali; è quella di stimolare le capacità critiche individuali come garanzia per una pratica politica personale e collettiva.

Precisazione della pratica politica del giornale.

Abbiamo seguito queste discriminanti nel mettere assieme e stampare i primi due Sottosopra; il terzo è stato espressione di scelte in parte diverse: anziché da una lettera indirizzata alle donne e ai gruppi perché inviassero i loro scritti, ha preso avvio dall'incontro di febbraio a Milano su sessualità - maternità - procreazione - aborto. E' stato perciò un numero di taglio monografico, temporalmente puntuale, con contenuti "selezionati" dalla presenza all'incontro, e dei quali si è stampata la trascrizione (che è diverso che scrivere).

Da queste esperienze e dalla maggiore complessità della nostra pratica politica, ci sembra che gli strumenti che ci eravamo date per rendere operanti le discriminanti iniziali (un indirizzo che sulla base delle nostre conoscenze fosse di gruppi autonomi e non misti, la pubblicazione letterale di scritti o trascrizioni) vadano ora verificati più in profondità, precisandoli rispetto alla realtà attuale: la pratica del movimento ci ha fatto vedere che il modo con cui potevamo applicarli all'inizio per tener fede a quelle discriminanti non è più sufficiente, perché si è ampliata e complicata.

Ci siamo poste il problema:

— cosa vuol dire stimolare la precisazione di una pratica politica femminista rispetto al giornale?

Non basta più una discriminante definita a priori ed applicabile meccanicamente a garantire l'autonomia e la non censura del giornale: occorre dare fiducia ad un modo diverso di fare il giornale che faccia crescere nei fatti questa autonomia, che ci sollevi nei fatti dalla censura — di noi stesse, delle altre, degli altri.

L'esperienza passata del giornale ci fa vedere molti problemi non risolti; nel concreto, sono stati:

— dove e come ci si prendeva l'iniziativa di avviare il giornale (tutte e tre le volte da Milano, difficoltà di formulare la proposta agli altri gruppi, difficoltà di accoglierla rispetto ai propri tempi)

— la volontà di non essere una redazione si scontrava contro le scelte che era necessario fare per es. nell'ordine di pubblicazione del materiale che arrivava, o nell'impaginazione e nella scelta dei caratteri, o nella scelta dei titoli; si scontrava con la necessità di stare dietro agli scritti di chi aveva detto che li avrebbe mandati, o con la difficoltà di scrivere un "editoriale" esauriente e soddisfacente per tutte...

— la divisione del lavoro: chi scrive e chi no, perché; chi spedisce e chi raccoglie gli articoli; chi li ribatte a macchina; chi fa l'impaginazione, chi si cura dei soldi, chi va avanti e indietro in macchina...

— il problema dei costi: son legati al numero di pagine che avrà il giornale, e se si dice che si stampa tutto ciò che arriva, come si fa se arrivano molti più scritti del previsto? quali si escludono o si rimandano ad un successivo numero (l'anno dopo? ...) E se ne arrivano meno?

Son legati anche al numero delle copie stampate: 10.000 copie del secondo Sottosopra erano troppe, 4.000 del terzo troppo poche, ma ormai tutti e tre sono quasi introvabili....

Son legati alla "politica del prezzo": chi diceva 'Deve costar poco perché le donne non han soldi', chi 'Deve

copie le spese con un margine per le copie perse', chi 'Deve coprire le spese (mantenere) anche ui quelle cui lo fanno'

- il problema del finanziamento: il criterio di finanziare la fabbricazione del giornale (carta e tipografia) indicando ciascun gruppo o città quante copie ne avrebbe vendute e pagandole anticipatamente ci sembrava adatto a responsabilizzare tutte sia sulla faccenda dei soldi sia sul problema della distribuzione e della diffusione. Ciò invece ha funzionato piuttosto male (e malissimo per Sottosopra n. 2): bisogna perciò discutere una maniera più stabile per assicurare il finanziamento del giornale.

La proposta.

Da questa esperienza del giornale, da tutti gli aspetti piacevoli ed entusiasmanti che anche ci sono stati nel lavoro collettivo, e dalla considerazione che di fronte alla ricchezza e alla maggior sfaccettatura della nostra pratica solo la proposta di una creazione collettiva del giornale ci sembra adeguata, nasce l'INIZIATIVA che ci sentiamo di proporre a quelle donne che vogliono esprimersi e comunicare con altre donne:

un momento di incontro, stabile, mensile: una "giornata" (sabato e domenica ultimi di ogni mese) nella quale veniamo da tutta Italia perchè vogliamo fare un numero di Sottosopra (che quando sarà pronto uscirà, magari dopo due o tre incontri), perchè abbiamo degli scritti da portare, perchè vogliamo leggere e discutere quelli delle altre con loro, conoscerci personalmente, parlarci delle nostre esperienze.

Queste giornate si sposteranno di città in città, basta stabilirlo assieme alla giornata precedente. Decideremo i numeri che vogliamo fare, i temi preferiti, le forme espressive: se sarà una monografia o una raccolta di temi, una "riflessione teorica" o un numero di fumetti; quante pagine avrà, quante copie ne stamperemo e quanto costerà; come lo pagheremo e lo distribuiremo, dove lo stamperemo ecc.

Questo lavoro esclude la redazione perchè aperto a tutte le donne che vogliono impegnarsi in questo progetto, e soprattutto costituisce una pratica collettiva che faremo, donne di diverse città, donne di diversi gruppi: la cosa più importante sarà conoscerci, parlare di noi e dei nostri gruppi e della nostra pratica, parlare degli articoli che da questa pratica scaturiscono e delle difficoltà incontrate, non tanto per vagliarne i contenuti o la forma, ma per accrescere la nostra consapevolezza critica.

Ci sembra che il mettere al centro anche della costruzione del giornale la pratica dei rapporti tra donne nel loro farsi costituisca la nuova essenziale discriminante adeguata alla fase storica del movimento che stiamo vivendo.

Milano, giugno 1975

gruppo per il giornale

The objective of the text was to encourage women to keep working on the publication, despite these difficulties, as it was deemed crucial to maintain this channel of autonomous narration of and information for the movement. The following passage is interesting in that it outlines the group's willingness to continue with the journal endeavour and explains why.

After every Sottosopra number we tried to discuss it in a very articulated way. The discussions were shared among those who contributed to the publication, debating about the methods, sending letters to other cities and assembling it physically; those who sent articles, those who read it and were interested in it.

These discussions have been not always productive, they say, as in some cases they felt there was a lack of involvement by other women; others were glad that the journal existed but only passively involved in creating it. The group that is writing is very interested in the project, in contrast:

[...] around ten of us kept alive the discussion on the practice of the movement regarding writing and the making of the journal. We believe that there could be a stronger relation between:

Our gathering together which is increasingly more frequent, our discussing which is more diverse and more free, the deepening of the relations among us, the increased trust towards women, the search for conditions to live and work in a different way than family and traditional production and political systems (ecc...: it is difficult to indicate exhaustively our political practice!) and

the modes of writing, of graphic designing, of debating and circulating the journal. We believe that the journal could be a mean and a steady occasion for this practice (yes, just like the houses, the "headquarters", the Bookstore, the meetings...) and

not a “family album” sporadic and fixed: actually we do believe that the real journal is not much the printed end product that at some point is going to circulate but the work of transformation that we ignite towards ourselves and from which the journal comes from.²⁹

On a further reading, this passage appears to be a key junction for understanding the interconnection between the development of the group’s political thought and their practical endeavours. Firstly, it shows that they were aware of their reflexive practices in relation to their practical endeavours. Secondly, it allows to better identify the nature of the reflection, engaging as it does the relationship among the political (“the movement practice”), expressive/theoretical (“the writing”), and material practices (“the journal”). It is thus a reflection on the chain connecting a thought to an object. Thirdly, and most importantly, the last part represents the authors’ understanding of the need to maintain a close interrelationship (“We believe that there could be a stronger relation between”) between two conventionally separated spheres (a separation which is signalled and reinforced by the graphic layout, as the image above shows), namely the spheres of political and organisational practice.

Within this relational structure, organisation is meant to be more than merely a static image of the group, and its ‘real’ product is meant to be more than an object. Rather, organisational practice is conceptualised as an occasion for practicing politics.

This section focused on some early practical endeavours, such as the publication of the periodical *Sottosopra*, and presented different

²⁹ The underlined parts appear in the original text.

texts documenting the group's process of learning to manage this project and their reflections on this task in order to understand the grounds on which the *pratica del fare* developed.

5.4 Theorising the 'practice of doing': the text "Time, Means, and Spaces"

The 1976 text *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*³⁰ is considered a seminal moment in understanding and developing the *pratica del fare*:

The theory behind the new politics of doing among women is condensed in a two-page text which appeared on January 20, 1976, as a leaflet signed by the whole Cherubini collective; it was published in Sottosopra no. 3 under the title «Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi» ["Times, Means, Spaces"]. (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 83)

Women's oppression, the text argues [cf. image 6], has multiple facets (physical, psychological, sexual, economical) and levels (unconscious, ideological). "That is why our political practice has to confront and tackle all these aspects and take the time, the means, and the space to transform the reality of our own dispossessed body (in its sexuality and in its generative quality) to transform the social, political, ideological reality in which women are exploited, silenced, obliterated". In this context, what the movement needs is to have the right time and spaces capable of hosting women, their relations, their projects, and their work. "In such places, we can affirm our interests and open up

³⁰ Leaflet *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*, 1976, consulted at ALM at FB, Milan (3.1. B. 20, F. 8) and ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 20, F. 8). The text will be published in Sottosopra (1976a).

dialectically towards the reality we want to change. That is why organising meetings, setting up a place, having adequate spaces to overcome the public-private separation is more subversive than a loud rally". The main idea that emerges here is the focus on not only modifying the self, but also attempting to enter the societal sphere and modify reality. Even more so, these places themselves have been theorised as the spaces in which such modification is to take place.

Thus a new theme is introduced: the theme of a female politics no longer centered on access to consciousness and speech, but rather on the joint transformation of the female body and the social body. [...] The political contents acquired earlier are thus reformulated in new terms. The new terms are *create* and *transform* – create female social spaces in order to transform the given reality. The transformation concerns both the women involved and the project and society. These are not two distinct aims but two sides of the same process whose dynamic element is the conflict between autonomous female interest and generic social interest. (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 84)

Personal transformation and the possibility of societal transformation are therefore intimately linked to one another, a point that was also stressed by Luisa Muraro in our interview.³¹ After reading out loud to her a phrase from the leaflet which I consider key, "una necessaria trasformazione soggettiva che fa corpo con la possibile trasformazione sociale", I asked her about the idea of the 'practice of doing' and expressed my research interest in the idea of places founded and instituted to transform both society and those who inhabit them. She pondered this and replied by warning me not to rush to the phase of societal transformation but rather to linger on the point of personal transformation, which at the time represented the novelty of feminism,

³¹ Interview with Luisa Muraro, 30th November 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

a personal transformation that *fa corpo*, “is co-substantial with” the possibility (meaning that it is not guaranteed or taken for granted) of societal transformation. “A personal transformation that has to be at the same time image and mean [*prefigurazione e azione*] of a societal transformation. Yes, that is it”.³²

Women of the time who were overwhelmingly bursting into the social or public sphere had the chance to transform society not via their involvement in society as it was (an idea that would instead represent the traditional emancipation paradigm) but by virtue of their own transformations, their contributions, as new, autonomous subjects. It was the fact that women thought of themselves as subjects and created places in which to unpack their practices and theorisations that *per se* gave society the chance to change along with them.

To summarize, the expression *pratica del fare* indicates different things. A historical moment signalling the birth of a different way of organising within the movement, going beyond private houses as aggregation points and avoiding the formal connotations of the unwelcoming, cold ‘headquarters’. Women laboured to create physical spaces devoted to activities focused on the preservation, distribution and valorisation of the knowledge generated by the women’s movement, and therefore constituted a way of expressing and maintaining the *presa di parola* gained through the movement. This expression also indicated the idea, which remained central in later formulations as well, that the division between intellectual and material work does not make sense, and that “doing” (the various activities and projects) instead constitutes the possibility in and of itself to generate thoughts, which *vice versa* are grounded in concrete processes and projects. This does not mean that “doing” is only an effect of political practice. The places created must be understood not as means for pursuing political analysis but rather as the content of political analysis itself. The possibility of transforming and liberating

³² Interview with Luisa Muraro, 30th November 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

women can emerge in specific spaces, run by women for themselves, that act as mediating grounds in the dichotomy between the private and public spheres. The space, the project, is in itself a modification of society.

To this point the chapter has engaged in unpacking the 'practice of doing' as a specific feminist practice linking political and organisational endeavours and focused on analysing its key tenets. The following section narrates the story of one of the organisations born during the years of the 'practice of doing', thus highlighting this take on the 'practice of doing' as a historical moment in which numerous enterprises were set up.

il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi

Esiste un'oppressione *materiale* specifica delle donne che non è vista. Molti tendono ancora a far passare il movimento di lotta delle donne per un movimento d'opinione o culturale o etico.

Lo sfruttamento materiale delle donne ha cause ed effetti che non dipendono dall'arretratezza della nostra società e che non si rimediano con i movimenti d'opinione:

- la presa di potere dell'uomo, attraverso il nome e la proprietà, sul mondo della riproduzione della specie, presa di potere su un fare — produrre bambini — che è del corpo delle donne
- divisione rigida del lavoro, doppio lavoro, emarginazione dall'unico lavoro considerato produttivo, quello esterno alla famiglia
- soggezione fisica: donne picchiate, violentate, impedito a muoversi da sole per le strade, per paura di provocare la violenza maschile; dipendenza economica e psichica: casalinghe, prostitute e in generale tutte le donne che, in una scena storica in cui gli uomini giocano tutti i ruoli e tutte le commedie, si possono sentire esistere solo se riconosciute o assimilate nel mondo maschile
- violenza fisica e psicologica al momento del parto, dell'aborto; imposizione brutale delle leggi del mercato: fai tanti figli che ci servono, fanno pochi che siamo in tanti, non abortire, abortisci, ecc.

Nei sei anni di pratica per analizzare e superare le nostre contraddizioni concrete, abbiamo capito che la nostra oppressione e liberazione non sono riducibili ad un livello puramente economico, ma devono affrontare una complessa realtà da articolare in distinti livelli: biologico-sessuale, inconscio, ideologico ed economico.

Di conseguenza la nostra pratica politica deve affrontare e coinvolgere tutti questi livelli e darsi il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi per trasformare la

realtà del nostro corpo espropriato (nella sua attività procreatrice, nella sua sessualità) per trasformare la realtà sociale, politica e ideologica, nella quale le donne sono sfruttate, ridotte al silenzio, rimosse.

Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi *adeguati* vogliono dire creare delle situazioni in cui le donne possono stare insieme per vedersi, parlarsi, ascoltarsi, mettersi in relazione l'una all'altra e alle altre; vuol dire coinvolgere in queste situazioni collettive il corpo e la sessualità, in un luogo collettivo non regolato dagli interessi maschili. In questo luogo noi affermiamo i nostri interessi ed apriamo una dialettica con la realtà che vogliamo trasformare.

Allora, fare degli incontri di giorni, costruire una sede, avere dei luoghi adeguati a superare la separazione tra privato e politico, è qualcosa di più sovversivo di una manifestazione appariscente.

Fare una libreria è coinvolgere molte donne in un lavoro comune, è aprire a tutte uno spazio accessibile di comunicazione ed informazione, ed è un momento di lotta per un popolo senza scrittura, assente dalla storia, come le donne.

Fare dei gruppi che cercano di analizzare i rapporti tra le donne, l'isteria, le nevrosi, i sintomi del corpo e la sua espressività, con un'ottica analitica, cioè che ha attenzione all'inconscio e alla sessualità (infatti l'inconscio modella il corpo e condiziona il nostro agire, e noi vogliamo liberare il nostro corpo per modificare la realtà che ci opprime), questo non è immergersi nell'intimità e nell'irrazionalità, come alcuni credono, ma al contrario ancorarsi alla *materia*. Siamo stupefatti di imbatterci in una sinistra marxista piena di idealisti che hanno orrore del corpo e della materia.

Siamo consapevoli che, trattandosi di una pratica politica nuova, molte cose sono ancora da

sperimentare, trovare, ed altre da correggere. Comunque non ci serve lo sfogo, lo scioglimento nevrotico della nostra inibizione a parlare, a farci sentire, ad agire; non ci serve ad esempio un gesto clamoroso di poche che hanno magari in testa idee che ritengono giuste e pensano andar bene per tutte le altre.

La trasformazione collettiva esige che ci sia un ascolto reciproco, comunicazione; una volontà in cui nessuna delega niente alle altre. Lo scontro, cercato per reagire al senso d'impotenza, ci rimette invece nella logica dove dominano gli uomini.

Sfogo, rivaia, rabbia, ci sono sempre stati e non sono serviti.

Non ci basta, dunque, ed anzi non siamo d'accordo: perché, passato lo sfogo, le cose restano come prima. Mancando poi la specifica nostra pratica politica, si apre un vuoto che può essere riempito dal femminismo ideologico. E' ideologico rivaleggiare con gli uomini, e vale quanto valevano i tentativi per convincerli: ci svia dai nostri interessi e bisogni e in questo si logorano tutte le nostre forze.

E' ideologica la mobilitazione sull'aborto, così come è fatta, perché sostituisce ad una pratica dove le molte esigenze, possibilità e diversità vengono conosciute e tentate, un obiettivo unificante per tutto il movimento, e perché

lascia le donne immодificate nel rapporto col corpo e con gli uomini. Il riformismo qui consiste nell'isolamento di un obiettivo in seno ad un movimento che opera una messa in discussione globale del sistema e dei ruoli femminili.

Il movimento, mettendo insieme molte donne, ha liberato energie ed aperto nuove possibilità. Dalla pratica degli anni passati si è imposta alle donne l'esigenza di trovarsi tra di loro e di decidere in autonomia.

Sarebbe ingenuo pensare che a questo punto gli altri stiano solo a guardarci: hanno dei programmi e naturalmente cercano di ficcarci dentro anche noi.

Diventa quindi essenziale in questo momento avere grande attenzione alle modificazioni nostre e della società, e nello stesso tempo approfondire e portare avanti la pratica femminista in tutta la sua specificità.

Del resto, si è visto nei fatti che le cose cambiano in quanto rafforziamo e valorizziamo i rapporti tra le donne, e *qui ci basiamo* per decidere cosa volere, cosa fare.

Collettivo dei gruppi femministi
di Via Cherubini
Milano, 28 gennaio 1976

5.5 *La Tartaruga* publishing house, the story of a feminist enterprise

The publishing house *La Tartaruga* (“The Turtle”)³³ was founded in Milan in 1975. “It is not a random date” - long-time collaborator Rosaria Guacci pointed out – “in that year the *Libreria delle Donne*, one of the fundamental places for Italian feminist theory opens in Milan and the Roman *Edizioni delle Donne*, another publishing house devoted to women’s books, is born. The choice seems to have an internal necessity, meaning that the times, now mature, are asking for it.”³⁴ *La Tartaruga*’s founder, Laura Lepetit, had all the credentials for setting up a feminist publishing house: she had previous experience in the publishing industry (together with Anna Maria Gandini, she took over the historic bookshops *Milano Libri* and founded the journal *Linus*) and was part of the *Rivolta Femminile* group in Milano (cf. chapter 4, section 3 on *Rivolta Femminile*). The idea of setting up a publishing house was widely discussed in *Rivolta*, and Lepetit admits that the idea first emerged

³³ There are many reasons why the publishing house was named “The Turtle”. Lepetit herself says that she comes up with a different explanation every time people ask her why she decided to call a feminist publishing house “The Turtle” (Lepetit 2016: 36). The reasons she lists are that she liked the qualities usually associated with this animal (for example the fact that the turtle is a humble animal that slowly and calmly gets things done, needing only a few leaves of lettuce to survive), but she declares that she also chose the name as strategy: it was wiser to have a “ambiguous and adaptable name” than an explicitly feminist one (cf. *Editions des Femmes*, *Women’s Press*, *Frauenoffensive*, etc.) in case she needed to change her core focus over time. Donfrancesco 1994 argues that the symbology of the turtle (symbol of wisdom, fertility and internal strength, the ability to protect oneself from external dangers, as in the Chinese tradition where Ao is a gigantic turtle carrying the Earth on her back) is appropriate in representing the “secret, industrious work of women writers” that the publishing house wishes to promote.

³⁴ Guacci 1995: 4.

from the group and their discussions.³⁵ While discussion on the topic developed, however, Lonzi, the leading figure in the *Rivolta* group, distanced herself from the idea and ended up taking a definite stand against the creation of a ‘proper’ publishing house (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3). “Embarking that endeavor [*impresa*] – explains Lepetit in her autobiography – “would have entailed many compromises in terms of commercial laws, with issues of competition, and the liberty of publishing books out of the [publishing industry] context, which *Rivolta* was doing, would have been gone. She [Carla Lonzi] was undoubtedly right, these challenges and risks were real. [...] To separate and take different paths was the only way. And that was my way, I knew it, it was very clear to me, and this belief could not be erased”. (Lepetit 2016: 67).

It was precisely the establishment of the publishing house *La Tartaruga* that marked Lepetit’s leaving *Rivolta*: “Set up *La Tartaruga* lead me to the break with Carla Lonzi. It has been an epic fight.” (Lepetit 2016: 66-7).

During our encounter, Laura Lepetit at the same time expressed her great respect for Lonzi, who in her autobiography she defines as “the one encounter that changed my life”,³⁶ and her feeling of having achieved her own, irrevocable, life’s desire, the establishment of a publishing house. The idea of publishing the writings of other women was “like a sparkle... I thought: but it is *my* story! I have to follow it, I

³⁵ Lepetit 2016:66. Cf. also the statement by the publishing house’s founder in the “Our Books” section of *Almanacco delle Edizioni delle Donne* 1978: “La Tartaruga Edizioni ha cominciato le pubblicazioni nel dicembre del 1975. Penso sia nata da due esperienze precedenti: quella di lavoro alla libreria *Milano Libri* e quella di partecipazione a un gruppo di autocoscienza, dove si è a lungo discusso delle donne della cultura. Così ad un certo punto i libri invece di venderli sono passata a farli. Con prudenza, con lentezza, per cui *La Tartaruga*”. (Fraire, M. et al. 1978: 103)

³⁶ Lepetit 2016: 58.

can't adjust to someone else's story, even respecting and recognising her own motivations and reasons, no?" she told me during our interview.³⁷ This position underlines the individual drive and motivation to establish this company while, as underlined in chapter 4, Lonzi framed the idea of setting up a publishing house and other projects as a common group effort.

In the footsteps of other international experiences such as *Editions des Femmes* and *Virago Press*,³⁸ the project set out to locate and publish texts, national or international, written by women, on the one hand shedding light on the history of women's cultural production, and on the other sustaining contemporary writers, especially Italian ones (Donfrancesco 1994: 638). In 1978, three years after founding the company, Lepetit wrote in the above-mentioned *Almanacco delle edizioni delle donne*:

It is too early to make an assessment, these are just work hypotheses. In choosing the texts, I had attention to the past, even if recent; how many things have been said and then have been lost in the midst of a male dominated culture. So, the first book has been an essay by Virginia Woolf, «Three guineas», that, written in 1937, is still up to date. Yet, it is only today that is recognised as valuable, thanks to women's work, as the male critique ignored it or judged it of few relevance. It is just an example among many possible examples. Taking back what is ours. Underline the continuity between present and past, the one arises out of the other. (Fraire et al. 1978: 103)

³⁷ Interview with Laura Lepetit, 16th November 2017, Milan. I am indebted to writer and journalist Maria Nadotti as she not only listened and advised me in the very early stages of this research, but also helped me to make contact with Laura Lepetit.

³⁸ The idea that *La Tartaruga* was not alone, that there were other examples to be inspired by, emerged in the interview with Lepetit.

The relational aspects together with the catalogue choices are indicated by both Laura Lepetit and Rosaria Guacci as the key feminist elements of this endeavour. The point is that a feminist endeavour is not only one that deals with feminism-related objects (feminist essays or texts) or has a feminist political stance (the agenda of publishing only women's books), but also one that is based on relations among women and with the women's movement. "It was an absolutely feminist publishing house, in every aspect, in the sense that it was a sort of bond among all feminists, all of those that had something to say came to us to propose it."³⁹ It is interesting to note that this idea of having a project through which the entire movement can express itself and to which it can contribute echoes the positions expressed in creating the *Sottosopra* journal (cf. section 5.3).

The first book of its catalogue⁴⁰ was Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, appearing for the first time in Italy and going on to become a seminal text that came to epitomise the symbolic birth of Feminism of Difference. *La Tartaruga*, besides publishing great international novelists new to the Italian market (for example George Sand and Virginia Woolf), had a catalogue comprising Gertrude Stein, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Grace Paley, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Marina Cvetaeva, among others, as well as great Italian writers (Anna Maria Ortese, Anna Banti, and Grazia Livi). *La Tartaruga* also scouted new contemporary Italian writers such as Francesca Duranti, Piera Opezzo, Maria Schiavo, and Bibi Tomasi.⁴¹ *La Tartaruga* "publishes the unravelling of thought by and in the group" (Codognotto and Moccagatta 1997: 17), that is to say it has always been closely associated with the feminist movement (cf. also Giacomoni 1995), and in 1987 it

³⁹ Interview with Laura Lepetit, 16th November 2017, Milan.

⁴⁰ Cf. *La Tartaruga* 1995 for a comprehensive outline and analysis of the *La Tartaruga* catalogue for the first 20 years.

⁴¹ Cf. Piera Opezzo, *Minuto per minuto* (1976); Maria Schiavo, *Macellum* (1979); Bibi Tomasi, *La sproporzione* (1980).

introduced an essay section to its catalogue inaugurated with *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*,⁴² the first book by the research community *Diotima*.

La Tartaruga decides of having an essay series when feminist thought, already present in many other expressive forms, systematizes itself and institutes relations and connection with the various theories that are in the midst of definition within the movement, national and international. The issue is to explore the nature of feminist theoretical research going beyond disciplinary boundaries, broadening the participation including realities and elaborations on an international base, with particular focus to Italian, French and Anglo-Saxon feminism. (Guacci 1995: 14)

This extract is relevant as it shows how the creation of a feminist essay section was connected to the perceived systematisation and institutionalisation of feminist theory. This is very different from the fluidity of the early Seventies, when the movement was still developing and normally published its reflections in collective periodicals such as *Sottosopra*. This essay section of the catalogue featured several fundamental feminist texts,⁴³ and from 1993 onwards *La Tartaruga* started distributing the journal *Lapis: Percorsi della riflessione femminile*, founded in 1987 by Lea Melandri. *La Tartaruga* was established as a small independent enterprise with a limited number of new titles yearly (around 25) and its headquarters in the very centre of Milan, first

⁴² *La Tartaruga* went on to publish the first three books by *Diotima*: *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (1987), *Mettere al mondo il mondo* (1990), and *Il cielo stellato sopra di noi* (1992). *Diotima* was subsequently published by *Liguori Editore*.

⁴³ In 1989 *Sessi e genealogie* by Luce Irigaray, in 1990 *Scrivere la vita di una donna* by Carolyn Heilbrun and *L'io in rivolta. Vissuto e pensiero di Carla Lonzi* by Maria Luisa Boccia (a fundamental volume, the first essay devoted to analysing the life and thought of Carla Lonzi), in 1991 *Simone Weil. Una donna assoluta* by Gabriella Fiori, and in 1994 Rosi Braidotti's *Dissonanze*, among many others.

at Via della Spiga then at Via Turati. As a typical small entrepreneurial organisation, the founder Laura Lepetit took care of everything, helped a few years after the founding by editor Rosaria Guacci, specialised in Italian literature, and an external accountant and PR person.

What were we doing at *La Tartaruga*? Everything. It was the prototype of very small publishing house where we did things ranging from preparing the boxes, going to the post office to choosing the books – also thanks to many advisors- taking care of the books, a complete care, from beginning to the end of the process. This has been the first nucleus, but we have always been in two, just the two of us, [...] this formula of two people supervising [...] all the work is quite extraordinary. Some small publishing houses managed to maintain it. [...] All of those who had an extremely cultured founder, able to play many keys of the piano. I mean, without that vast of a culture [Laura Lepetit's] such a formula would never have worked.⁴⁴

The numerous consultants that Rosaria mentions have always been attracted to *La Tartaruga*, she explains, due to its specific cultural and political objective and sophisticated catalogue. It was a moment characterised by informal yet tight-knit connections: numerous book proposals or suggestions for and offers of collaboration were arriving at *La Tartaruga*.

It was quite peculiar, nowadays it might seem peculiar, but not once, because we were not the one searching for advisors, they were searching for us. After that *La Tartaruga*, thanks to Laura alone, gained recognition, it was very well known, very important, [...] they were the ones that.

⁴⁴ Interview with Rosaria Guacci, 17th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

And yes, the thing was based on relations, rather than on big money, which the house did not have. [...]

So it was not a scouting but a relational process that in time became essential. So, [...] I would call this publishing house – and then for a person like you working at Bocconi it might seem of little professionalism – but I would call it very political, in the sense of women's politics, because of this type of relationship building.⁴⁵

It is interesting to note how this passage expresses the idea that a business based on relationships would be judged negatively by “someone who works at Bocconi”, that is, at a Business School. Secondly, the quote shows the perceived incompatibility between professionalisation and political engagement.

The idea was that business was carried out and functioned at *La Tartaruga* in a way that was coherent with its cultural project. This coherence between cultural project and organisation was what granted freedom and independence.⁴⁶ The extract quoted below is interesting in that it expresses some elements that are key to the meaning of enterprise. The dialogue is between writer Grazia Livi (1930-2015), to whom the first ‘voice’ reported belongs, and Laura Lepetit, who provides the second voice (I will report the dialogue as it appears in the text, without specifying names, to respect the authorial stance of Grazia Livi).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Lepetit wrote in 1978: “The small publishing house formula offers all autonomy's advantages and the great difficulties in getting to be known and being sufficiently distributed so to be able to survive. The results are slow to come and much patience is needed but I believe I am not discouraged yet.” (Fraire, M. et al. 1978: 103).

- I am very pleased also because your person and your publishing house are in a perfect correspondence.
- You think? Once, in a magazine like many, I read a description of the turtle. Devoted, eating only a couple of salad leaves, gets far without stress. Look, I thought, this is really the animal representing me! No sooner said than done. It was 1975. I registered the trademark right off.
- The turtle is a resolute animal, actually, according to a legend, she knows only one way: forward.
- I was so enthusiast and so naïf! I did not even allow myself to have doubts. I could not even see obstacles, or, if saw them, I dodged them.
- Yes. The turtle has blinkers. The sides of the road are mysteries for her. Greeks regarded her as powerful for that.
- And yet I could not remember a single period without difficulties. So many! Sometimes I look back and I say: how did I do it.
- Tough and hard-working, here's the tortoise. In ancient Egypt armours were made out of her shell. I read somewhere that Moon's God, in Maya civilisation, wore an armour made of horn chips.
- Really? But I don't feel an iron lady at all.
- You have everything on your shoulders! At least one hundred and twenty authors, I don't know how many translators, two hundred and seven published books...
- If I would not bring everything on my shoulders the publishing house would not work. It works because the dimension that I maintain corresponds to the production.
- You see, how clever and cautious the turtle!
- Well, there's nothing strange, the burden I bear is the price of my freedom.

(Livi 1995: 24-5)

This passage explicates the meaning attached to the choice of name for the publishing house. The meanings embedded in the naming choice are connected to the sphere of affectivity and loyalty (the turtle as a devoted animal), to the idea of making a measured and sober use of

resources (“eating only a few lettuce leaves”) and of calm, even serendipitous determination in relation to a clear goal (a resolute, dedicated animal that “goes far without labouring”). Secondly, the extract is interesting because it elaborates on the idea of independence as a condition that is achieved through harmonisation, through resonance between the subject’s political program and organisational structure. This kind of process was seen earlier, in my analysis of the *pratica del fare*, and the idea is further expressed through the figure of the turtle (“you carry everything on yourself”), which represents coexistence between the self and the spaces that are inhabited. The organisational structure and feminist orientation of the business were maintained even when the publishing house was obliged to shift from its original few associates⁴⁷ to opening up to investors and, in 1990, was acquired by Leonardo Mondadori (Donfrancesco 1994: 638). The coherence and clear orientation of the project started fading with the second, more drastic acquisition by *Baldini & Castoldi Dalai*, the company that absorbed the publishing house in 1998.⁴⁸

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter comprises two different registers. The first one is analytical; the second the narration of a story. The chapter began by outlining some key elements constituting the notion of practice in the Italian feminist *milieu*: the embedding of theory into practices and the

⁴⁷ Namely Ida Levi and Marisa Caramella.

⁴⁸ In her interview, Rosaria explained to me how Dalai bought *La Tartaruga* in order to acquire its catalogue. The publisher also acquired Laura Lepetit and Rosaria Guacci, but divided, functionally and physically, what for 20 years had been the core of the project, putting Laura with the editors and Rosaria with the PR team. The *La Tartaruga* project as I have described it faded away, even if it still exists as a catalogue line in *Baldini & Castoldi*.

connection between theory and real, concrete situations, the consequent political nature of practices, the development of a situated language and the conceptualisation of the centrality of relationships. Overall, considering practice from a feminist perspective enriches our understanding of practice as something that we are necessarily accountable for and thus stresses the aspect of personal transformation. After this introductory section, the core of the chapter focuses on a key practice in feminist organising: the 'practice of doing'. I first introduced the main phases and developments that led to the definition of the practice, for example telling the story of the feminist journal *Sottosopra*, and then presented the 1976 leaflet *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi* theorising said practice. In conclusion, I presented the story of the enterprise of *La Tartaruga* as an example of a project born during the peak of theorising the 'practice of doing'.

Chapter 6

History of the foundation of Milan Women's Bookstore: from inception to opening

This chapter, based on the analysis of archival documents held at the Fondazione Badaracco in Milan, presents the history of *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* from the initial phases of setting up the project to its foundation in 1975. Section 6.1 presents the idea generation behind the creation of a women's library, section 6.2 outlines the foundation phase with the associated constitution of the cooperative running the *Libreria* and communicational activities aimed at presenting the project and requesting support; section 6.3 presents the phase of opening the shop, characterised by establishing a network of relations with the editorial field. The chapter ends with an extract from Bibi Tomasi's book *La sproporzione* (1980), a collection of short stories on feminists, the style of which resembles "jazz on paper" (*Libreria delle Donne* 2013).¹ During

¹ The expression is from a "portrait" of the writer by her fellow *Libreria delle Donne* members (*Libreria delle Donne di Milano* (2013)). The article, entitled *Ritratto di Bibi Tomasi*, presents Bibi Tomasi's life and work. Lillyam Tomasi, known as Bibi (Bologna, 1925-2000), was an Italian journalist (among other roles, she was a columnist for Mondadori for 25 years), poet and writer (*I padri della fallocultura*, SugarCo, 1974; *La sproporzione*, La Tartaruga, 1980; *Il paese di calce*, Pratiche editrice, 1999; *La patita dei gatti blu*, Quaderni di Via Dogana, 2001). She was one of the founders of *Libreria delle Donne di Milano*. It was Bibi who came up with the names of some of the *Libreria's* key publications such as *Via Dogana. Rivista di pratica politica* and *Aspirina. Rivista per donne di sesso femminile*. She was the author of several key photographs of the feminist movement; for example, the article reports, the cover photo of the Italian edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (*Noi e il nostro corpo*, Feltrinelli, 1974) was shot by her. Bibi's inheritance was

several of my interviews, when I explained my interest in hearing stories about *Libreria* life, I was told to read *La sproporzione* by Italian writer and *Libreria* founder Bibi Tomasi as her words have the power to narrate the flow of lives, relationships and activities in the bookstore. According to Lia Cigarini, for example, Tomasi is the writer who has been most successful in “expressing the sense of this strange organism” that is the *Libreria*.

6.1 The beginnings

In October 1975, the Women’s Bookstore opened in Milan after about ten months of preparation. Those months were devoted to finding the right place, refining the plans, settling legal problems, getting the women’s movement interested, looking for money, learning the bookseller’s trade (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 90)

The Milan Women’s Bookstore opened in 1975, the first one in Italy. The founders of the *Libreria* were: Giuliana Scarselli, Eleana Faidetti, Leonilde Carabba, Luisa Muraro, Giordana Carla Dapporto, Lillyam Tomasi, Bice Mauri, Giordana Masotto, Elena Medi, Lia Cigarini, Maria Teresa Meneghini, Zulina Paggi, Renata Sarfatti, Fiorenza Magnolfi, and Dontella Palazzoli.² It is worth noting that some of the founders

one of the sources of funding that allowed the bookstore to relocate in 2001. A collection of Tomasi’s textual and iconographic production is kept at the Women’s Bookstore archive.

² The signatures in the Statute are not entirely readable (Statute of the Circolo cooperativo delle donne “Sibilla Aleramo” alias Libreria delle Donne di Milano, *Statuto*, Scarselli Giuliana ecc..., 7 pages, 25th June 1975, ALD at FB, section “Apertura della Libreria”, 1.1. B.1, F. 2), but it is possible to reconstruct them by analysing the *Giornale Mastro* and registering the association fees deposited

came out of the very first feminist groups on the Italian stage: Lia Cigarini was a member (together with Daniela Pellegrini) of DEMAU, the first documented feminist group in Italy, while Luisa Abbà and Elena Medi came from the *Cerchio Spezzato* group in Trento (cf. chapter 4).³ This fact indicates that the history of *Libreria* has deep roots in the history of Italian feminism. The *Libreria* project itself took shape in keeping with the ‘practice of doing’, characterised by the two-fold aim of self-transformation and societal transformation through the creation of women’s spaces. The phase of formulating and refining the project entailed dialoguing with other, already established feminist bookshops,⁴ both in terms of relating with them personally and in terms of studying them. Numerous documents dating from 1969-1971 held at Fondazione Badaracco⁵ testify to the level of information and attention that Italian feminism was devoting to American events at this time.⁶

(*Giornale Mastro*, 1975-1976, register 1, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Administrative documents”, 1.5. B. 4, F. 1).

³ Both groups are addressed in chapter 4. Elena Medi later became part of DEMAU.

⁴ Milan bookstore was the first in Italy, but the process of creating women’s cultural spaces was common to the whole Western second wave feminism movement. In an interview with *Libreria* collective member Traudel Sattler, for example, the interviewee explained that she was part of the Hildelberg Women’s Bookshop before coming to Milan, and that this other bookshop in turn drew inspiration from the Munich Women’s Bookshop (interview with Traudel Sattler, 21st April 2018, Milan).

⁵ In the “Rassegne Stampa e Dossier” section there are documents concerning American feminism (ALD at FB, Milan, section “Femminismo U.S.A.”, 1.2. B. 6, F. 1).

⁶ Italian newspapers (*L’Unità*, *Corriere della Sera*) reported information about American feminism (for example, coverage of NOW – National Organization of Women – rallies, or reviews of seminal feminist books such as Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and Millet’s *Politics of the Sex*) and American newspapers

One hypothesis as to how the American material came to be held at the *Libreria* archive is that Serena Castaldi, founder of the *Anabasi* consciousness raising group (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2) and responsible for introducing several U.S. documents and materials to Italy, needed to “get rid” of them before leaving for the U.S. the second time and so left them to the *Libreria delle Donne*. When I asked her whether she still had the Women’s Liberation Pin [the interview was focused on feminist symbols and gestures], she replied: “Well no honey, I changed continent twice so I gave all my documentation to Feltrinelli, first stacks of documents on the Left to Feltrinelli center [Feltrinelli Foundation], then I had stacks of document on women’s movement. When I left for the Unites States I could not bring anything, I just left with a suitcase, and I gave everything to Libreria delle Donne.”⁷ She was referring to the late Seventies, and Libreria deposited its material in Fondazione Badaracco in 1999.⁸ Interestingly, the documents in question include a 1975 *New York Times* article entitled *A Bookshop for Feminists* by Virginia Lee Warren. The article was a review of *Womanbooks*, a feminist shop located at 255 West 92d Street in New York.⁹ Although documents show that they looked at other women’s

such as *Kaleidoscope*, *The New Yorker*, *Life*, *New York Post*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*.

⁷ Skype interview with Serena Castaldi, 3rd April 2016, Milan-Nice. The above is true for international documents brought in Italy by Castaldi while *Anabasi* documents have been kept by Castaldi. Many of them are now availbe in the Castaldi website <https://serenalucecastaldi.wixsite.com/femminismo> (last accessed 24-05 2019).

⁸ Libreria gave to Badaracco Foundation its material as gratuitous loan in 19/10/1999 as confirmed by Fondazione Badaracco’s archival responsible Laura Milani in 23/04/2019.

⁹ Virginia Lee Warren, *A Bookshop for Feminists*, «The New York Times», 15th July 1975 (ALD at FB, Milan, section “Femminismo U.S.A.”, 1.2. B. 6, F. 1). In the archive, the article is conserved without a date, but I retrieved it from

bookstores in many other countries,¹⁰ Milan's primary and explicitly identified reference point was the *Librairie des Femmes* in Paris, the bookshop founded in 1973 and connected to the French feminist group *Psychanalyse et Politique*, founded in 1968 by Antoniette Fouque.¹¹ By that point in 1975, the women had had several chances to meet. In 1972, for example, there had been a series of international meetings: first in June, organised by *Mouvement de libération des femmes* in La Tranche-sur-Mer and second at the end of October in Vieux-Ville, near Rouen, organised by "Psy et Po", events that served as occasions for various groups, including some of the women that went on to establish the *Libreria*, to gather.¹² A part of the *Libreria* group had direct contact with

<https://www.nytimes.com/1975/07/15/archives/a-bookshop-for-feminists.html>
(last accessed 15-03-2019).

¹⁰ In my interview with her, Muraro refers to her knowledge of other libraries (she uses the expression "the ones I saw") and cites those in Paris, London, and New York. In the archive, there are traces of correspondence with the Women's Bookshop of Zürich (letter from the *Frauenbuchladen* by Regula Schenk, 1st December 1976, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8). There are also documents testifying to the relationships with American and French feminism, but dated later than the Seventies.

¹¹ The bookstore and collective had also a publishing house, *Des Femmes*, founded in 1972. The relationship with *Psychanalyse et Politique* was indeed very relevant for the Milanese group, as they derived the *pratica dell'inconscio* from the French group. On the relationship between the Milan and Paris bookstores, cf. chapter 7.

¹² Cf. Lussana 2012: 73-4; Bracke 2014a: 77-8; *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* 1987: 42. The 1973 edition of *Sottosopra* documents the participation of Italian groups in French gatherings; in the 1974 *Sottosopra*, the text *Pratica dell'inconscio e movimento della donna* expresses the new political orientations participants acquired thanks to their relationships with the French movement. Participation at the "Psy et Po" meetings was also confirmed by Lia Cigarini in our interview, Milan (6th December 2017).

the Paris bookshop, as some of them visited it and others even spent time working there.¹³

IMG. 7 - Librerie des Femmes, Paris
My photograph, August 2018



¹³ These pieces of information, gathered during different interviews (L. Cigarini, L. Muraro, G. Masotto, F. De Musso, L. Abbà), all underline the fundamental political link with “Psy et Po” in Paris, “a very strong reference point” according to Giordana Masotto (interviewed on 15th December 2017) contributing to the inception of the idea of setting up the bookshop.

Thus, between visits to other bookstores and internal discussions, the process of organising and project definition commenced. The first retrievable document (see image 8) testifying to the elaboration phase is dated 18 December 1974.¹⁴

The text announces that “a place in the very centre of Milan has been found” and that “we are working on setting up and organising a Women’s Bookstore”. The document is a project presentation that follows a very clear pattern: the right side of the page presents information and a description of the project according to the section headers provided in the left part (“Where and how”, “Why a Women’s Bookstore”, “What will happen in the Bookstore”, “How to participate”, “Contact information and addresses”, etc.).

The first paragraph (“Where and how”) announces the project: “We have found a shop, in the centre of Milan, in Via Dogana 2, and we are working on setting it up: we are organising [literal translation: the verb is *stiamo organizzando*] the women’s bookstore”. The second paragraph (“Why a Women’s Bookstore”) justifies the decision to sell only women’s books as way to “retrieve and highlight” a presence (women’s cultural production) that has been obliterated from society.

¹⁴ *Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...*, Circolo cooperativo “Sibilla Aleramo” – Libreria delle Donne, 18 December 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.

IMG. 8 – Leaflet “Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...”, Circolo coop. “Sibilla Aleramo” – Libreria delle Donne, 18th Dec. 1974, 1 page [d] ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 1, F. 2). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione Badaracco, Milan.

Milano, 18 dicembre 1974

dove, così Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano, in via Dogana 2, e stiamo lavorando al suo allestimento: stiamo organizzando la **LIBRERIA DELLE DONNE** come centro di raccolta e di vendita di opere delle donne: libri e documenti sulla nostra pratica e lotta politica, anzitutto; e poi: grafica, pittura, fotografia ...

perché una LIBRERIA DELLE DONNE? Scegliamo di vendere solo opere di donne: anche in questo modo, vogliamo recuperare a noi stesse e mettere in evidenza una presenza sempre misconosciuta e inferiorizzata.
Pratica della nostra lotta è stata la “presa di parola”, l’interrogarsi sullo sforzo per trovare propri spazi espressivi fatto da noi e dalle donne prima di noi, quasi sempre nell’isolamento, nella distorsione e nella censura. Pensiamo che le opere delle donne siano una prima testimonianza, anche se a volte poco cosciente o mistificata, dell’esigenza di affermare la diversità del proprio sesso e della propria condizione che in questi anni nel Movimento ha trovato una sua forma di espressione politica.
Pratica della nostra lotta è trovare i tempi e gli strumenti (usandoli contro chi ne farebbe un uso capitalistico e contro di noi) per diffondere, discutere, approfondire tutto ciò che di nuovo le donne esprimono: il nostro è un tentativo di fare attenzione a questo “nuovo”, e la libreria vuol essere un luogo in cui esso si raccoglie e si comunica perché divenga ricchezza collettiva.

cosa si farà nella libreria Perciò, oltre alla vendita di opere (già) fatte da donne – saggi, romanzi, libri per bambini, quadri, grafica, dischi, fotografie ... – la **LIBRERIA DELLE DONNE** funzionerà anche come luogo in cui si raccolgono esperienze e idee da far circolare. In concreto, cioè, la libreria sarà uno spazio di incontro e di confronto aperto soprattutto alle donne, un luogo in cui si faranno discussioni, opuscoli, manifesti e ciclostilati (per informazione, di critica cinematografica, letteraria, di idee e fatti interessanti il Movimento delle Donne, di materiale per le scuole frutto della nostra esperienza ecc.)

come partecipare Questo è il progetto di partenza nel quale molte di noi si stanno impegnando. Abbiamo tuttavia bisogno di una collaborazione più larga, e le esigenze che abbiamo sono:
– che si mettano in contatto con noi tutte quelle che hanno materiale utile: racconto di esperienze, critiche, progetti ... Questo è anche un suggerimento a gruppi (insegnanti, donne che lavorano, studentesse, compagne ecc.) per produrre materiale che sarà pubblicato e diffuso dalla libreria. Lo stesso invito è rivolto a donne isolate, cioè non inserite in gruppi, che nella loro situazione abbiano maturato un sapere o fatto delle esperienze che vogliono comunicare ad altre donne.
– che si riesca a raccogliere la somma necessaria per aprire e far funzionare la libreria i primi tempi a prescindere dalle vendite. Per questo abbiamo calcolato che ci vogliono almeno 6 milioni e ne abbiamo 1. Abbiamo cioè bisogno di soldi. Per la gestione legale e amministrativa abbiamo formato tra alcune di noi una Cooperativa con un suo conto corrente al quale potete inviare il denaro. Sugeriamo a quelle che lavorano o studiano di fare una colletta tra le compagne. E ringraziamo.

indirizzi e c.c. Scrivete e inviate materiale a: Bice Mauri, via De Togni 29 - 20123 Milano
Giordana Masotto, via Guerrini 5 - 20133 Milano
Telefonate a: Luisa Muraro - 839.8315
Nilde Carabba - 284.1610
Inviare denaro sul c.c. n. 8128 della banca “Monte dei Paschi di Siena”, agenzia n. 3 di via Mazzini 7 - 20123 Milano, intestato a

CIRCOLO COOPERATIVO “SIBILLA ALERAMO”
LIBRERIA DELLE DONNE

They also speak about rescuing something and rediscovering it for themselves, rather than claiming something from someone else. Their first interlocutors are women themselves; larger society comes later.

The content of our struggle has been the conquest of the agency of speech. The content of our struggle is to find the times and means (using them against those who would exploit them in a capitalistic way) to disseminate, debate and develop and study the novelties produced by women: our effort is to pay attention to such novelties, and the bookshop seeks to be a place where this new is harvested and communicated so that it can become a common treasure.¹⁵

This passage can be seen to reference the *pratica del fare* (with the word choice “times and means”) and the idea of autonomously directing something that was and is exploited and appropriated (a recurrent theme for the feminist enterprises of the period; a focus already seen, for example, in the *Edizioni delle Donne*’s statement analysed in chapter 5). Indeed, the *Libreria* was cited in the seminal document *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*: “Setting up a Bookstore is involving many women in a common work, is opening an accessible space of communication and information, and is a moment of struggle for a people without writings, absent from History, as women are”.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...*, Circolo cooperativo “Sibilla Aleramo” – Libreria delle Donne, 18 December 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.

¹⁶ Leaflet *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*, 1976, consulted at ALM at FB, Milan (3.1. B. 20, F. 8) and ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 20, F. 8). The text will be published in *Sottosopra* (1976a).

The following paragraph, “What will happen in the Bookstore”, connects *Libreria* activities to the political objective of the enterprise; the sentence opens with a conjunction:

That is why, beside selling already-made women’s works (essays, novels, children’s books, paintings, graphic design, music, photos...), the bookstore will also work as a place in which to gather and disseminate experiences and ideas. Concretely, it will be a meeting space, a space for debate dedicated primarily to women, a place in which discussion will take place, in which pamphlets, manifestos, cyclostyles will be made (for information, on literary and cinema critique, on ideas and events that are of interest for the Women’s Movement, we will also make material for schools on the basis of our experience, etc.).¹⁷

The quotation informs readers that the *Libreria*’s initial project started off with an idea of a much wider ‘commercial offering’ that would have encompassed music and contemporary art as well. Secondly, the first line expresses the aim of selling already-made works and promoting the generation of new ideas. Concretely speaking, this means establishing different spaces according to different functions and producing different kinds of material. The *Libreria* project has a political and cultural dimension: the goal of rediscovering past heritage and supporting contemporary women’s thinking along with the commercial side of the enterprise is not conceived as conflicting with the political one; rather, it is a means for achieving political goals.

Interestingly, this text was analysed by the authors themselves 12 years later, in 1987, in a passage from the collective history *Non credere di avere dei diritti* written by the members of the *Libreria* (cf. chapter 7 for a

¹⁷ *Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...*, Circolo cooperativo “Sibilla Aleramo” – Libreria delle Donne, 18 December 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.

focus on this text). What is interesting here is that they reflect on their own past by telling a story. The appraisal of the 1974 text stresses the ‘dual movement’ of relating with both the present and the past.

A leaflet dated December 18, 1974, states that the place has been found, illustrates the project, and asks for help. The idea of setting up a bookstore [...] relates to the past and to the present: to the past, because “the practice of our struggle has been to speak out”, and “early evidence” of this is found in the works of feminist thought; to the present, because the “practice of our struggle is to find the *times* and *instruments*... to disseminate, discuss, go in detail into everything new that women are expressing”. The bookstore being planned is intended as a space in which “it – the new – will be gathered and communicated so that it may become collective wealth”. (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 90-1)¹⁸

The project of the *Libreria* thus entailed a ‘dual movement’: towards the past, with the rediscovery and valorisation of female cultural production, and towards the present, as the *Libreria*, already conceived as practical endeavour, represents a way of employing women’s energy and vision. Up until this point the group had communicated the plan and nature of the library: a bookshop, a commercial space for women’s cultural production, a point of research and dissemination, a meeting and debate space.

¹⁸ The italics are present in the original text. Teresa De Lauretis and Patricia Cicogna’s translation of “the practice of our struggle has been to speak out” refers to “la pratica della nostra lotta è stata la presa di parola”.

The second part of the document addressed the practical side: “This is our initial project, but we need wider collaboration, and these are our needs”. The first set of needs indicated comprise contacts and information: they ask women to reach out and share “materials, projects, and critiques”. The founding group made clear that the invitation was also open to women who were not connected to feminist groups but were willing to share their experiences or knowledge. I am inclined to read this as a sign of the anti-ideological stance of the Libreria group, [cf. chapter 7 on the debate regarding ideological feminism] and this way of proceeding by asking for contributions from a broader group of women, contains a trace of the organising style characterising the early *Sottosopra* publication (cf. chapter 5, and specifically 5.3).

The second type of need is financial. The group asks for money to “open and get the Booksotre running in first period regardless the sales [*a prescindere dalla vendite*]”.¹⁹ The text does not specify to whom they are addressing this request for financial support, but from the tone of voice and organisation of the leaflet it is possible to say that the supporters were participants in the students’ and women’s movement community. The idea of setting up the bookstore to be autonomously sustainable and not dependent on sales in the initial period should be read, I would argue, as evidence of careful planning and an awareness of the start-up costs for such a project (furnishing the space and bookstore catalogue, etc.) rather than a generic statement in opposition to selling. For this purpose, they continue: “we have calculated that we need at least six million, up until now we have one. Namely, we need money”. There is not more information available as to whether this call was answered and by whom, but it was clearly not entirely successful seeing as the group later went on to raise money in other ways, by sending letters to figures in the art world, as the following paragraph explains. The document closes with information on the founding of a cooperative “for administrative and legal needs” (it is thus possible to

¹⁹ The text is underlined in the original.

send money to the dedicated bank account), detailed contact information (addresses, names, phone numbers) and an expression of thanks.

This document expresses a nodal point in the *Libreria's* relationship with the commercial/market sphere. While before the commercial side of the venture was framed as part of the meaning of the group's political project, here autonomy is articulated as independence from the tyranny of the market. In other passages, as I will show below, the bookshop collective instead formulated a balanced position towards the market, analysing it in its limits but also conceiving it as a tool that would guarantee the *Libreria's* autonomy from public funding.

The process of establishing the *Libreria* proceeded. Another document²⁰ presents the *Libreria* project and asks for support in a way that differs from the previously mentioned document. In fact, this later communication appears to be a less indistinct 'call for support' as it begins by referring to the reader as "dear" and the content seems to be tailored to issues having to do with the visual arts. After having presented the *Libreria* project, a paragraph specifies that the *Libreria* is interested in all aspects of women's creativity,

with a specific focus on painting, sculpture and graphic design:
we are indeed thinking about the possibility of setting up an

²⁰ Cara, tra le donne che a Milano..., unsigned, attributed to 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2. The original document is not dated, 1974 is the date attributed by the archive. I could not retrieve certain information about the attribution, if it was done by Badaracco Foundation team or by Libreria delle Donne, but, as the material of this envelope are organised in a Libreria delle Donne folder, different from the folders of the Badaracco Foundation, my hypothesis is that the attribution has been made by Libreria delle Donne archivists, before the *Libreria* deposited its archival material at Fondazione Badaracco archive.

independent gallery of women's contemporary art. And we'd like this to be a beautiful, non-oppressive, not intimidating space, a space for our own and for our struggle.²¹

While the central part of the communication suggests that it specifically targeted artists, the reference to the qualities of the bookstore location recalls the centrality accorded to space in the ideas and expression of *pratica del fare* texts. The idea of a "beautiful, non-oppressive" place resonates with Antoinette Fouque's description of *Librairie des Femmes* in Paris, a "boutique verte, belle et accueillante", a green (both the colour of the premises and a reference to the presence of plants and flowers), beautiful and welcoming shop.²²

The conclusion serves as an explicit invitation to materially support the project:

As you certainly know, creating a meeting and commercial space entails a great financial and organisational effort, that is why, if you are interested and if you like this project, we ask [*ti preghiamo*] you to contribute. [...] For sure during your professional activity you happened to contribute monetarily or in kind with your works of art, always for others; we encourage

²¹ *Ibid.* The text continues with an idea for the inauguration of the bookstore: "We would like to inaugurate the Libreria with an international collective exhibition of women's art". This project was never fulfilled but, as I point out later, this relationship with contemporary art was central to the material establishment of the space.

²² "Cette boutique verte, belle et accueillante, où livres et journaux, y compris en langues étrangères, sont consultables au milieu des plantes et des fleurs, tenue par des militantes qui se font libraires, est immédiatement connue comme lieu de rencontre et de parole, centre de ressources culturelles et universitaires, rendez-vous d'information et de mobilisations..." (*Librairie des Femmes. A propos.* <http://www.librairie-des-femmes.fr/content/4-historique> – last accessed 01-03-2019).

you, now, if you are convinced of the meaning of this activity, to contribute directly to it.²³

In this case, the rationale of fundraising hinges on two elements. One is professionalism, as they reference the fact that their interlocutor “surely knows” that establishing an enterprise requires financial support, and that, in their professional life, they are used to supporting projects via in-kind donations (i.e. donating their own works of art). The second is political: if you are convinced by and engaged with the significance of this project, they say, then you should directly support it. The unsigned document ends with the usual formula of giving names and address for further information: the contact people listed are Luisa Muraro and Nilde Carraba, a visual artist and part of the founding group of the *Libreria* who went on, a year later, to participate in a visual arts-centred project to sponsor the *Libreria*. The relationship with artists and the visual arts field in Milan proved to be a key element setting up the *Libreria*, as will be demonstrated in the next paragraph. This document provides a trace of this kind of relationship and support.

6.2 The foundation

The cooperative (*Circolo cooperativo delle donne “Sibilla Aleramo”*²⁴ – *società cooperativa a responsabilità limitata*, based in Milan) was officially founded in May 1975:²⁵

²³ *Cara, tra le donne che a Milano...*, unsigned, attributed to 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2. The original document is not dated, 1974 is the date attributed to it by the archive.

²⁴ Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1960) was an Italian writer and poet. Her publications include the autobiographical book *Una Donna* (Società tipografico-editrice

The cooperative, chosen because it was considered the *forma associativa meno rigida prevista dalla legge*²⁶ had the task of “acquiring books, journals, magazines, music records and tapes, paintings and any other audio-visual communication media that relates to women’s condition as well as feminine issues in general, and to promote their dissemination and acquisition among members as well as non-members sharing the objectives and purposes of the cultural association” (Statute, 1975, art. 2).

Cooperative membership was open to every profession, as long as the member is a woman (Statute, 1975, art. 4), while access to the bookstore was open to both men and women.²⁷ The founders who signed the document contributed 30,000 liras each to the foundation.²⁸ They were asking for any kind of support, also from among non-feminists. The notary handling the registration of the statute, for example, represented a specific type of contribution even though he was probably unaware of his role during the foundation of the *Libreria*. As the founders told me, an important Milanese woman decided to support the project not by giving them money directly, but by giving them... her husband! In

nazionale, Rome-Turin, 1906) which was received as a seminal anticipatory feminist text.

²⁵ Statute of the Circolo cooperativo delle donne “Sibilla Aleramo” alias Libreria delle Donne di Milano, Statuto, Scarselli Giuliana ecc..., 25 June 1975, 7 pages, ALD at FB, section “Apertura della Libreria”, 1.1. B.1, F. 2.

²⁶ Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne*, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Manifesti”, 1.3. B. 1, F. 1. Cf. also Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987: 103. This element was also repeated in some interviews, such as the one with Lia Cigarini.

²⁷ *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5. B. 10, F. 1) and at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).

²⁸ *Giornale Mastro*, 1975-1976, register 1, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Administrative documents”, 1.5. B. 4, F. 1.

fact, the notary continued to help the group of women *pro bono* in the legal phases.²⁹ This anecdote is also reported in the *Breve Storia della Libreria* (an unpublished 1983 text written by the collective that is analysed in chap. 8):

The Bookstore is, from a legal point of view, a cooperative. The funniest bureaucratic thing was when we went to the notary for the cooperative founding act. Some got fancy dresses, one was even sporting a big hat, and we were all a bit moved.³⁰

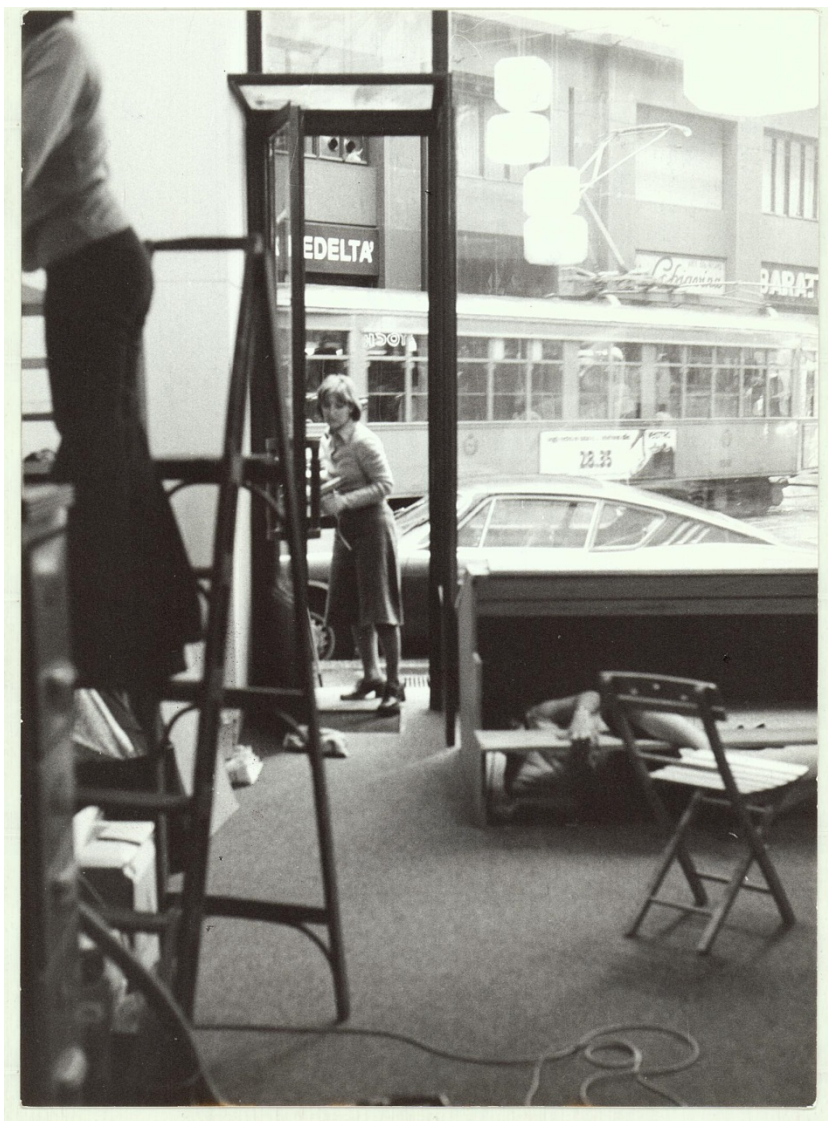
This use of practical connections and stratagems can be seen to resemble many entrepreneurial practices wherein the founders employed ‘creativity’ as well as their own personal energies to find the means to support the project. In setting up the bookstore spaces the *Libreria* women employed strategies to use the materials in the most efficient way: for example, the same wood was used to create both the bookshelves and the shop window display, created by *Libreria* women in a very particular way: “They [The architect Ileana Faidutti and Elena Medi] set up this sort of thing, shaped like a staircase, to display books [...] there is this photo where you can see Elena Medi lying down, trying to build something...”³¹

²⁹ Interview with Luisa Muraro (Milan, 30th November 2017) and Interview with Lia Cigarini (Milan, 6th December 2017).

³⁰ *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5, B. 10, F. 1) and at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).

³¹ Interview with Lia Cigarini (Milan, 6th December 2017).

IMG. 9 - Photo of the set-up of the Via Dogana bookstore, 1975
All rights reserved. Photo by Bibi Tomasi. Courtesy of Libreria delle Donne di Milano.



Individual support and stratagems aside, a crucial role in the establishment of the *Libreria* was played by a group of visual artists, as section 6.4 outlines. After requesting and receiving support for its opening, the *Libreria* began a period of negotiation, intense communication and organisation of the space. While in 1974 the communications were directed more to possible founders, after the foundation of the shop the objective of communications was to inform the public about the opening and to establish connections and networks with the industry.

My archival analysis, focused not only on explicitly political documents but also examining administrative sections,³² finds that they were different types of letters: some written to engage the feminist movement, others to inform journalists, and still others to present the group and the project to industry actors (publishers, distributors, etc.) and artists. For example, on 22 July 1975 the *Libreria* sent a letter to a publishing house: “We communicate that in September the CIRCOLO COOPERATIVO DELLE DONNE SIBILLA ALERAMO – cooperative society with limited liability, will open the “WOMAN’S BOOKSTORE” based in Milan, in Via Dogana 2”.³³ They continue by presenting the cooperative’s mission, citing their Statute, before articulating their proposed actions:

Specifically, the bookstore’s aims are on the one hand to set up an action of revamping of women authors, novelists and essayists, forgotten or undervalued and on the other to be

³² ALD at FB, Milan, section 1.1 *Documenti politici*, “Political documents” and section 1.5 *Carte amministrative*, “Administrative documents”.

³³ Communication letter to a publishing house, *Vi comunichiamo che a partire...*, Circolo cooperativo “Sibilla Aleramo” – Libreria delle Donne, 22 July 1975, 1 page, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1. The bookstore sent similar communication to *Adelphi* (22nd September 1975).

committed to diffuse vastly and with intelligence the ever increasing rich and diverse female contemporary production.³⁴

Finally, they highlight the ‘competitive advantage’ of their proposal: “We believe ours is a contemporary and unique offer and that it could not only interest the public, increasingly keen on problems of the female condition, but we hope this could also pave the way for a mutually stimulating and fertile relationship with Your Publishing House”.

They argue that the proposal might fit the contemporary reader interest in women’s issues, thus employing an instrumental argumentation that does not appear in their political statements (the choice of the word “offer” to define their project is significant evidence of this point) to appeal to an industry actor. With the opening date approaching, more communications-driven activities were set up. At the beginning of the month, on October 3, the bookshop invited female journalists (they refer to *giornaliste*) to a private meeting.

The opening of the bookstore is imminent. It is an original and innovative bookstore, and since it is useful for journalists to have the chance to get information and to see it in person [...] we invite you to a meeting with the bookstore’s group, in Via Dogana, at 6pm, hoping that you would be able to come, given the fact that we will not share extra information via telephone or other private communication channels. Arrivederci.³⁵

³⁴ Communication letter to a publishing house, *Vi comunichiamo che a partire...*, Circolo cooperativo “Sibilla Aleramo” – Libreria delle Donne, 22 July 1975, 1 page, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1.

³⁵ Invitation to journalists and press conference (Comunicato alle giornaliste e invito alla conferenza stampa), *È prossima l’apertura...*, Libreria delle Donne, 3 October 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B.2.

The few lines of the invitation letter convey a two-part message. On the one hand, there is the invitation to a private meeting aimed at promoting the bookstore opening; on the other, the group also delivers a statement about their 'policy' of privileging personal, face-to-face relations over other channels of communication. This illustrates a more mediated strategy: on the one hand, they 'concede' something to commercial logic by virtue of organising the press conference, but on the other they feel it is important to clarify their position (similar to that of *Rivolta Femminile* as presented in chapter 4) on providing information: either the journalists show up in person or they will not give out any information (or was this a strategy to bring people to the physical space, which they deemed important?).

A few weeks later, on 16 October, they asked the important, nationally distributed feminist newspaper EFFE³⁶ to announce the opening of the bookshop. This document³⁷ is particularly interesting as it contains:

- A comment by the collective on their own leaflet announcing the opening of the bookshop [cf. section 6.3 of this text, image 10], a comment that testifies to the information-selection criteria and rationale with which it was written. In the document, they write: "we aggregated the most important news according to us: the political meaning of this place and of

³⁶ EFFE has been the first feminist monthly periodical, founded in 1973; it lasted until 1982. The first two years it was published by *Dedalo*, after which it was published autonomously by the EFFE Cooperative and distributed nationally. The historical archive of EFFE is nowadays openly available online: <http://efferivistafemminista.it/>.

³⁷ Communication to EFFE, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.

this activity, the way in which we granted ourselves instruments to realise it.”³⁸

- The request that the information be published, “we do hope that you could give space to this document on EFFE”, is coupled with the assurance that the bookshop will also sell EFFE on its premises, even though, they say, they are facing some financial burdens. “Of course we want to sell EFFE here in the Bookstore; we still don’t have enough experience to foresee how many copies. We think that fifty might be good, if you don’t want to risk too much on returns. Anyhow, maybe you can judge also thanks to the La Maddalena experience you have. We are going to pay the sold copies with the usage discount (30%). We are under self-management as well [*autogestione*] and therefore we have financial problems; however we will try to pay you within month from the next issue publishing. We would also like to keep the old numbers here for a while before returning the unsold”.³⁹

These lines express that practical experience in running a space was the basis for managerial knowledge. This can be seen from two passages, when they say that they still do not have enough experience to make skilled previsions about numbers of copies sold and when they trust

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.* I could not find information on Effe answer, however, there are traces of many exchanges and communication between the bookstore and the journal. For example, there are communications from *Libreria* (20th May 1977) asking to Effe to send manifestos for the 8th March, manifestos that were on the cover of the march 1977 number of Effe. Effe replied saying that they will send the manifesto on 31st March 1977 (cf. Effe 1977, March issue, retrievable at Effe digitalised archive <http://efferivistafemminista.it/2014/11/aborto-una-analisi-della-legge/> – last accessed 24-04-2019). There are also letters containing information on invoices and payments status (*Libreria* to Effe, 5th May 1977 and 15th March 1977 and Effe to *Libreria* in 22nd March 1977 and 3rd March 1977). All communications conserved at ALD, at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.

the EFFE newsroom with judging, in part “based on your experience at la Maddalena” (another feminist cultural centre, based in Rome).

An analysis of the correspondence gives provides evidence of the intense work carried out in setting up the bookstore journal supply⁴⁰ as well as the documentation part, thus testifying to the fact that the bookstore had conceived of its archival and documentation role from the very beginning (this issue is addressed in more depth in chapter 8). On 29 October 1975, the bookstore wrote to *Notiziario del centro di documentazione di Pistoia*:⁴¹

We communicate that “La Libreria delle donne” has recently opened in Milan, in Via Dogana 2. Moreover, we are setting up, near the selling space, a reading and consultation room with international documents of the Feminist Movement. Therefore, we would be interested in receiving, by subscription, your newsletter and if possible also past issues with news on the woman question.⁴²

⁴⁰ Correspondence with *Edizioni Dedalo* to receive *Inchiesta* journal issues (23rd October 1975), correspondence with *Donna Woman Femme* (DWF) publication to receive publications (ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8).

⁴¹ Communication to *Notiziario del centro di documentazione di Pistoia*, 29th October 1975 (ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8). Pistoia’s Documentation Centre, born in the Sixties, has been a historical place for discussing countercultures and contemporary social issues. It is still open today and, since the beginning of its activity, it has been devoted to the retrieval, conservation and dissemination of materials and information connected to the culture of the students’ and workers’ movement. In the Libreria delle Donne Archive (at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3, 1974-1975) there is also a letter from the Pistoia Center (22nd April 1977) where they say how they wanted to be informed about activities and initiatives by *Libreria* and therefore they ask to be keep informed by receiving a copy of their products, thus testifying a reciprocal interest.

⁴² *Ibid.*

The letter opens by immediately defining the bookstore as a documentation centre instead of spending time narrating the meaning and need for a women's bookstore – a story that was told in earlier documents – and with the request for materials to be collected there.

The same request was made to *Editoriale di Padova* (5 November 1975)⁴³; the format is also the same, as the letter's incipit is about the fact that the *Libreria* is "not only a selling space but a place open to every woman. We are interested, therefore, in being informed about your editorial activity, and about your documents, for our reading and consultation room".⁴⁴ The *Libreria* women thus understood the choice to keep magazines and journals in the bookstore premises as not only a commercial strategy to ensure a rich variety of material and news, but as part of a project of preservation and dissemination. This does not mean that the group believed everything had to be conserved as archival material: in the following lines, in fact, they specify that it was announced at a feminist meeting⁴⁵ that the Padua group was producing a "feminist diary" and they would like be sent copies so that they might sell them.

6.3 The opening

It is thus clear that the *Libreria* group had been active in preparing the bookstore opening since at least 1974. I Following the material traces

⁴³ Letter to *Editoriale di Padova*, *Care compagne...*, 5th November 1975, typewritten text, 1 page, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ The national feminist meeting to which they are referring is known as the 'Pinarella meeting' after the place in the Italian region of Emilia Romagna where they were held; the first one in 1974 and the second in 1975.

constituted by archival documents, the project set-up phases could be schematised as follows.

TAB. 5 - Bookstore constitution process until the opening and key supporting documents

Phases	Traces	Key Supporting Documents
1974 Project presentation and fundraising	Leaflets announcing the project and location; letters presenting the project and asking for in-kind and financial support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...</i>, Circolo cooperativo "Sibilla Aleramo" – Libreria delle Donne, 18th December 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2. - <i>Cara, tra le donne che a Milano...</i>, unsigned, attributed to 1974, 1 page [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.
May 1975 Society constitution	Statute of the cooperative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Statuto, Scarselli Giuliana ecc...</i>, 25th June 1975, 7 pages, Statuto del Circolo cooperativo delle donne "Sibilla Aleramo" alias Libreria delle Donne di Milano, ALD at FB, section "Apertura della Libreria", 1.1. B.1, F. 2.
June-October 1975 Set-up and communication	Letters to publishers and newspapers, invitations to journalists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication letter to a publishing house, <i>Vi comunichiamo che a partire...</i>, Circolo cooperativo "Sibilla Aleramo" – Libreria delle Donne, 22 July 1975, 1 page, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comunicato alle giornaliste e invito alla conferenza stampa, <i>È prossima l'apertura...</i>, Libreria delle Donne, 3 October 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B.2. - Communication to EFFE, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.
October 1975 Opening	Flyer announcing the bookstore opening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, <i>Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne</i>, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section "Manifesti", 1.3. B. 1 F.1

A 1975 manifesto⁴⁶ [cf. image 10] presenting an image of a "gruppo familiare composto tutto da donne e contornato da un lungo testo che riepone il progetto in un linguaggio di calcolata semplicità" (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987: 103)⁴⁷ announces the opening and provides information about the newly founded space, which opened to the public the 15th October of 1975.⁴⁸

The iconographic choice is interesting as it represents a visual metaphor of the group's understanding of itself as a family, or possibly the idea that the historical women writers, scientists, and intellectuals

⁴⁶ Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne*, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.3. B. 1, F. 1.

⁴⁷ *Non credere* went on to analyse the text as well, which, as I have noted, was also the case with other historical documents.)

⁴⁸ On the Libreria website it is written that Libreria opened on 15th October <http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/category/puntodivista/vd3/> (last accessed 26-04-2019).

the *Libreria* looks up to and promotes by selling their texts in order to establish a strong common history constitutes the virtual or intellectual family of contemporary women. This might be a sort of visual representation of the concept of genealogy [cf. chapter 7 for an analysis of the concept]. The text starts off with the communication of the opening: “The Women’s Bookstore has opened in Milan, in Via Dogana 2. As with any other shop, it is situated on the street and anyone can enter”.⁴⁹ Then it presents the political motivations first, then lists its collateral activities (discussion, presentations, etc).

⁴⁹ Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne*, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Manifesti”, 1.3. B. 1. F1

IMG. 10 – Leaflet “Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne”, 1975 ALD at FB, Milan (1.3. B. 1. F1). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione Badaracco, Milan.

Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, La Libreria delle Donne

Come ogni altro negozio, dà sulla strada e chiunque può entrarvi. E' stata realizzata perchè le donne possano servirsene. 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, se lo desiderano, stabilire dei rapporti non più dominati dalla rivalità né frammentati dall'isolamento della vita di ogni giorno. Lo stare tra donne, un'esperienza vissuta e pensata in comune, è infatti il punto di partenza della nostra pratica politica. Nella libreria si vendono soltanto libri scritti da donne. Si raccolgono e si distribuiscono materiali ed informazioni che interessano le donne e la loro lotta politica. Si tengono incontri e si presentano opere prodotte da donne. Abbiamo voluto far incontrare nello stesso luogo l'espressione della creatività di alcune con la volontà di liberazione di tutte. Si dice che nella cultura non conta essere uomo o donna; forse questo non appare nell'opera, ma dietro il prodotto finale visibile c'è un lavoro che vuole tempo, che richiede certi strumenti e che implica il corpo, base di ogni produzione. Il corpo è caratterizzato sessualmente e porta le tracce di una condizione storica. Sul nostro peso — come fossero naturali ed immodificabili — limitazioni derivanti dalla sua assegnazione al lavoro di 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 ed artistica — con una parte forse inevitabile di competizione verso il mondo maschile — poche donne si sono prese, nell'uso del tempo, del pensiero e del corpo, una libertà che veniva giudicata scandalosa e che noi vogliamo sia di ogni donna, qualunque uso voglia farne. A realizzare la libreria siamo concretamente arrivate con una raccolta di fondi, in gran parte provenienti dalla vendita di quadri offerti per solidarietà da artiste. Il lavoro pratico è stato seguito da una cooperativa (Circolo cooperativo delle donne « Sibilla Alarano ») perchè questa ci è sembrata la forma associativa meno rigida prevista dalla legge. Alla gestione politica

hanno partecipato anche altre, interessate a far esistere la libreria. Questa non è finanziata: deve necessariamente bastarsi. Ma da oggi in avanti l'uso e la funzione della libreria non sono più affare del gruppo che ne ha curato la realizzazione, poiché, per consapevole decisione iniziale, la libreria diventa luogo di tutte le donne che vi entrano, anche soltanto per comprare un libro o chiedere una informazione.



La Libreria delle Donne
Via Dogana 2 (Piazza Duomo) Milano

The second part of the manifesto explains the “practical work” the group carried out in order to open the library, and underlines that the endeavour was achieved thanks to fundraising (“We were able to concretely realise the Libreria project with raising of funds, mostly coming from the selling of artworks donated solidarity by women artists”) yet not externally financed, that is to say not supported by public money, and that it is self-sustaining (“it is not financed, it has to be sustainable”). The manifesto closes with a paragraph that states “But from now on the use and The iconographic choice is interesting as it represents a visual metaphor of the group’s understanding of itself as a family, or possibly the idea that the historical women writers, scientists, and intellectuals the *Libreria* looks up to and promotes by selling their texts in order to establish a strong common history constitutes the virtual or intellectual family of contemporary women. This might be a sort of visual representation of the concept of genealogy [cf. chapter 7 for an analysis of the concept]. The text starts off with the communication of the opening: “The Women’s Bookstore has opened in Milan, in Via Dogana 2. As with any other shop, it is situated on the street and anyone can enter”.⁵⁰ Then it presents the political motivations first, then lists its collateral activities (discussion, presentations, etc). The second part of the manifesto explains the “practical work” the group carried out in order to open the library, and underlines that the endeavour was achieved thanks to fundraising (“We were able to concretely realise the Libreria project with raising of funds, mostly coming from the selling of artworks donated solidarity by women artists”) yet not externally financed, that is to say not supported by public money, and that it is self-sustaining (“it is not financed, it has to be sustainable”). The manifesto closes with a paragraph that states “But from now on the use and function of the bookstore are not anymore the business of the founding group (*il*

⁵⁰ Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano*, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Manifesti”, 1.3. B. 1. F1

gruppo che ne ha curato al realizzazione), because, following a well-considered initial decision, **the bookstore belong to every woman entering the space** even if only to buy a book, or ask for information.”⁵¹

Newspapers of the time covered the news of the opening of the bookshop, some with enthusiasm, others with explicit sarcasm and opposition.⁵² In its first week of operation the bookstore had a total of 200,000 liras⁵³ in sales and, as mentioned above, the space was conceived from the beginning as an archive and documentation centre as well. It seems that with the end of 1975 the start-up phase was completed, as there are no more documents concerning requests for materials, funds, and collaboration or announcing the bookshop's opening.

The following phase is characterised by the beginning of the more explicit political work of the *Libreria*, at least according to the earliest conserved document dating to 1977. A simple, handwritten leaflet inviting people to a public political discussion⁵⁴ indicates that the political activity of the bookshop as a collective entity had begun.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid.* The bold font appears in the original document.

⁵² Some newspapers covering the event have been for example *Il Giorno* (article of 19/10/1975), *Annabella*, (Without date), *Grazia* (2/11/1975), *L'Avanti* (18/10/1975), *La Stampa* (24/10/1975), *Amica* (Without date), *Quotidiano dei Lavoratori* (15 ottobre 1975). (newspapers clippings covering the event, ALD at FB, Milan 1.1 b1 f2)

⁵³ Analysis based on the documents: *Corrispettivi* (“Incassi a fine giornata”), 1975-1989, register 1, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 3, F. 3.

⁵⁴ *Comunicato di convocazione di una riunione sull'impegno politico dell'8 marzo e sulla pratica delle bancarelle di vendita dei libri*, 22 February 1977, 1 piece, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 4.

⁵⁵ In fact, we know that in the meantime some of the bookshop women were active in producing the documents connected to *pratica del fare* (1975-1976).

6.4 The support from the art world

Although it is less investigated than other aspects, the relationship between the *Libreria* and visual arts, the connection between them was actually fundamental. In fact, “When the bookstore opened, three millions had been collected, largely by the sale of works donated by women painters (Milan Women’s Bookstore collective, 1990: 92).

Contemporary artists supported the bookshop opening by lending gratuitously their work of art to the bookstore, which where then sold by the bookstore. The art world also came out to support the *Libreria* in a second moment, after the opening, when art critic and curator Lea Vergine curated a selection of artists multiples, called *Cartella delle Artiste*, which was sold to fund the bookshop. The front of the yellow card inviting people to the opening [see image 11], held on 16 December 1975, features information (place, time, name of the artists) about the opening and notes that a text by curator Lea Vergine will be present.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Introduzione, presentazione della cartella di grafica realizzata per l’apertura della Libreria da alcune artiste (Accardi Carla, Bentivoglio Mirella, Berardinone Valentina ecc.) e curata da Vergine Lea*, ALD at FB, section “Apertura della Libreria”, 1974-1978, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2. The flyer for the invite is dated 16th December 1975. It is not clear how the curator text is positioned; it probably accompanied the portfolio of the artists. A version of this text (two pages, typewritten and dated 15th July 1975, thus five months before the opening) is held at the Libreria Archive in Fondazione Badaracco. The text introduces the artistic initiative and briefly presents each artist and her work. In 1980, Lea Vergine launched the seminal *L’altra metà dell’avanguardia* exhibition accompanied by a discussion in the *Libreria* (as the analysis of the archive testifies: *Trascrizione dell’incontro su “L’altra metà dell’avanguardia: donne e arte”*, section “Libreria 1980”, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 9.) The influence of *Libreria delle Donne* and Corrado Levi in considering art history and critique from a feminist perspective was explicitly recognised by Vergine in a 2015 interview with Massimiliano Gioni. On the occasion of his curatorship of *La Grande Madre* exhibition at Palazzo Reale, Milan (26th August-15th November 2015), Gioni celebrated the crucial exhibit

The back side of the card reads: “This *cartella* originated from our moment of solidarity towards the women’s movement and particularly towards the ‘women’s bookshop’ opening this year in Milan. Each one of us has contributed gratuitously to the project and the graphics have been tailor-made for it”.⁵⁷

In this invitation, the artists declare their political support for the *Libreria* and go on to formulate their position regarding the market-oriented logic of the art world:

With a transformative and transgressive gesture we decided to set a political price for the Cartella, that is to say, an extremely

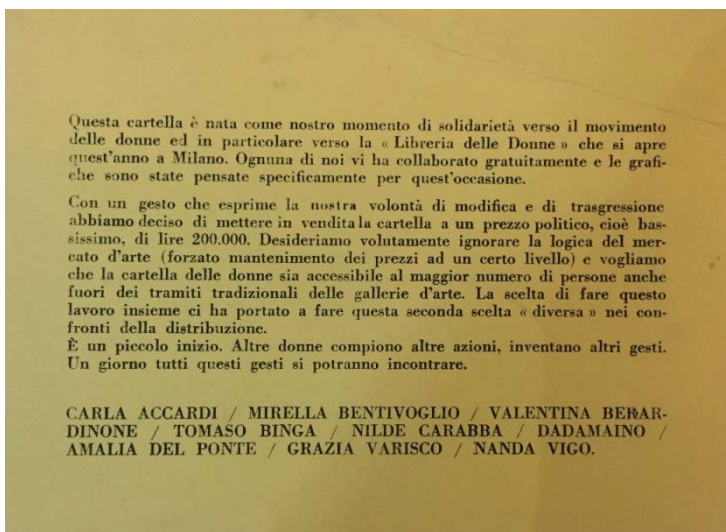
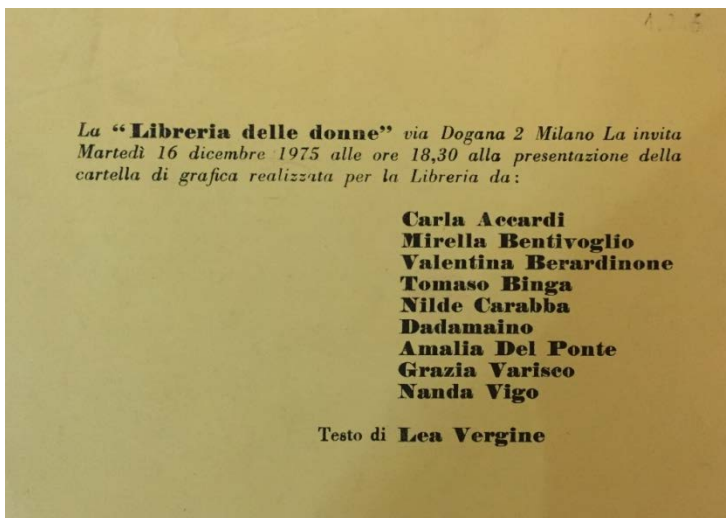
L'altra metà dell'avanguardia, the first Italian exhibit devoted to narrating modern art exclusively through the display and analysis of female artists' works, through an interview with Lea Vergine. In the dialogue, when asked about the genesis of the idea, she said that she had been asked by Lia Cigarini, Luisa Muraro and Corrado Levi to present an artists portfolio (the *Cartella delle Artiste*), but at the time she was puzzled: “In writing for the first time on nine women artists, among them Carla Accardi, Dadamaino and Amalia del Ponte, I started to gain consciousness about terrifying disparities...So, after having written, and after inevitable troubles with my ‘personal’, I had such a turmoil within me, maybe a true suffering.” Simultaneously, she explains, the international art world was starting to delve into the vast material of women’s art through studies or exhibits, but most of the projects were, according to Vergine, “misguided attempts”, or mere, “depressing” exercises in counting women artists, banal researches or ones that were set up only in following a trend. “So, I said to myself” continues Vergine in the interview “the time has come to embark in serious research and start to look at the behavior and moves of women artists, those that were in the avant-gardes groups, having a parallel space, not being mimetic towards what’s the male companions were doing.” (Gioni and Tenconi 2015: 267-70).

⁵⁷ *Introduzione, presentazione della cartella di grafica realizzata per l'apertura della Libreria da alcune artiste (Accardi Carla, Bentivoglio Mirella, Berardinone Valentina ecc.) e curata da Vergine Lea*, ALD at FB, section “Apertura della Libreria”, 1974-1978, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.

low one, of 200,000 liras. We are deliberately ignoring the art market logics (constrained price setting) wishing that the women's Cartella might prove accessible to the larger public, even outsiders in relation to the traditional art system circuits. The choice to do this together has influenced us in pursuing this second «different» decision towards distribution strategies. It is just a small beginning. Other women are carrying out other actions, conceiving other gestures. One day all of these gestures might meet. CARLA ACCARDI / MIRELLA BENTIVOGLIO / VALENTINA BERARDINONE / TOMASO BINGA / NILDE CARABBA / DADAMAINO / AMALIA DEL PONTE / GRAZIA VARISCO / NANDA VIGO.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

IMG. 11 - Postcard / Invite to *Cartella delle Artiste* (front and back)
ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 1, F. 2). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione
Badaracco, Milan.



Some of the works, including pieces by Carla Accardi, Valentina Berardinone, and Vittoria Chierici, can still be admired today in the display window of the bookshop (cf. chapter 8).

Thinkers in the field of contemporary art theory and research have also recently explored *Libreria* thought, giving rise to both works of art and seminars reflecting on the practices of the *Libreria della Donne*, with a particular focus on *affidamento* (cf. chapter 7 for an explanation of the meaning of this practice).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Some examples are the work of artist Alex Martinis Roe and her extensive research on feminist genealogies (cf. the work *Genealogies; Frameworks for Exchange*, 2011-2012). Roe has studied and reflected upon the theories and practices of the *Libreria*, and has explored the meanings of the *affidamento* practice and its potential application in contemporary discourse (cf. the works *The Practice of Doing*, 2012-2013, and *To Become Two*, 2014-2017). For example, the video installation *A story from Circolo della rosa* is part of the project *To Become Two*, a collection of films based on the artist's engagement with different feminist collectives worldwide (Milan Women's Bookstore cooperative; Psychanalyse et Politique, Paris; Gender Studies – formerly Women's Studies – at Utrecht University; a network in Sydney including people involved in the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative, Feminist Film Workers, Working Papers Collective, and the Department of General Philosophy at Sydney University; and Duoda Women's Research Centre and Ca la Dona, a women's documentation centre and meeting space in Barcelona). The project became a book in 2018 (Martinis Roe 2018). The analysis conducted by the London-based project *Feminist Duration Reading Group* considered Italian feminist texts from Carla Lonzi, Luisa Muraro and the Milan Bookstore Collective (*Feminist Duration: The Milan Women's Bookshop Collective and the Practice of the Unconscious*, held on 7 June 2016, SPACE Mare Street, London). The group was also involved in launching the *Now You Can Go* project and seminars (1-13 December 2015) exploring the concepts of generation and genealogy and inspired by Italian feminism, as the presentation explains: "The programme draws inspiration from Italian feminisms, including the work of collectives formed in the 1970s: Rivolta Femminile (Female Revolt), Libreria delle Donne di Milano (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective), and Lotta Femminista (Feminist Struggle)". One of the project coordinators, curator Helena Reckitt,

6.5 Thursdays at *Libreria*, a literary account

Thursday at *Libreria* is always a busy day because we are in three making the shift, except for unexpected last minute events, like Jenni that can't come and me having to run some errands so I ask Enrica to open, Enrica is one of the most precise, present, a model really, and the last time she was wearing a brown velvet suit with a pirate twist, the scarf tied behind the neck and a studded belt, at least it seemed like it to me, but then women are coming to greet us, and besides those that come to consult books, buy books, asking news about meetings, Collectives, what are they doing in 'Col di Lana', there are ours friends like Laura that if she's not going to her mare arrives with her charming smile, or Piera that instead has a Turin sadness on her hair, a white rain on thick, well-groomed partly dark hair and eyes lost in the chaotic rolling of the city, and Lia that shows up on time, with the sharp smile that is the sign of affinity with her sister Gabri, and Annina, uncombed, I always saw her like that and I was wondering If brushes had been ever invented, and maybe no, and our Ida filling hearts with warm blood, she seems barefoot, maybe she walks a lot, and her nice figure sways in flounced skirts, and then Lia sits in a agile position, I mean literally like someone who knows about tightrapes, but no actually about yoga, very much, like her sister, but Francesca Sacchi maybe

held seminars on the legacy and relevance of *affidamento* practices for contemporary feminism theory and organising (cf. *The Feminist Practice of Affidamento* at the University of Reading in February 2017; *Affidamento – Creating Feminist Solidarity in Art and Curating*, Friday 15 June 2018, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst). Curator Gabrielle Moser has also been influenced by the practices of the *Libreria*, especially *affidamento*, leading her to create the EMILIA-AMALIA project in Toronto (cf. Moser and Reckitt 2016). This international resurgence of interest in Seventies-era Italian feminism has also been fuelled by studies on Carla Lonzi carried out by scholars such as Giovanna Zapperi and Francesco Ventrella, and further testified to by the work of Paris-based collective Claire Fontaine and Chiara Fumai (1978-2017). Cf. also Casavecchia 2018.

even more but she's not coming in Libreria, my friend Franca Spirito arrives from her city center office with the pensive vibe of one that does not have an office, and many others [...].

Ren is late and the meeting has already begun, downstairs, in our bunker, which sometimes gets cleaned up, Luisina says leave it to me and I'll make it shine and we say no, we refuse, why should everything be weighting only on one? Hordes of women slide downstairs, there is high affluence for the Thursday meeting on novels, we are discussing *Menzogna e Sortilegio* by Elsa Morante, read and re-read by many during summer, and Elena Modiano stays upstairs with me, she says Jupiter is benevolent with you in this period, in this year, are you doing something creative? I do, but how can I say, how can I explain to her that one production is eating out the other? [...] but in the meanwhile others are arriving, we take Ren upstairs in the loft to recover, and we see Crispi's tail dress sliding down the stairs to the bunker where the meeting is raging, and we don't feel like it and yet we hear it nonetheless, a petulant voice comes up, but then arrives the Parma group, the two Patrizie going down drag down the voice, but it comes up again and Pierre comes out quickly, she kicks it and says let's play ball, but we can't, Lia whispers that new and original things can blossom out of rickety ones [*dalla sgangheratezza*] and Luisina descant on Morante's various talents, a woman hit by the marriage with Moravia, but freed with prodigious qualities from disastrous, ominous Moravia, yet she made it, she run, she is safe, escaping to other adventures, mostly to her writing, smooth, dazzling, prodigious, to her talents of female genius, and so a voice says she's a woman of letters, no, the husband is a man of letter, participating, invading every space, even there are a few, and taking space he spaces out others, meaning that he literally wipes them away, cliff or not, he always finds a hole were to throw them, so in the end she's not a woman of letter, she's a writer sais Luisa, a woman is a writer only if she writes and if she has not internalised a man, why, are there any? asks the petulant voice, and Franchina then shouts out that she doesn't care about volumes, the more swollen they are the more we have to burn them, deflate them

and the petulant voice dissect while the girls start to get sleepy, what's going on says Luisina rolling blue, did you take valium? Or is Milan's pollution gas? Then enters Ro she is late because she was in Piacenza at a writer's meeting and she saw Fachinelli delivering an energised speech [*tener banco*] in front of a clammed up crowd, and the train is always the train, especially if coming from the South, are you still doing the Morante meeting? [...] and in the meanwhile Ren comes down from the loft and she says I am desperate, and so let's close, that's what I say, I will tell you a comforting story and where are we going after? At Daniel's who is making us dinner, well it is July from Parma making it, what are we vainly fighting for, we are going away, I shout towards the stairs, and while I turn of the shop window lights with the same old clic and clic of the switch I hear an infernal sound coming from the bunker and as a fool's crowd the girls are coming up shoving each other up through the narrow stair that some time ago Ileana the architect in charge of the works did not properly narrow down, but partly closed it, because there was a hole and after the construction of the wall the stair was so shrunk that the two metal bookshelves-containers that I bought from Mondadori moving to Segrate, fighting with greedy journalists that at night were taking everything, nobody knows how, even the stuff with tags "sold" on it, I was saying, the two bookshelves could not pass and almost we couldn't, so Zulma sold it back at the same price and we repaired the loss, but in the meantime here they are coming up and it seems like downstairs there is a shipwreck and that the submarine is sinking, they are not coming up they are actually popping, jumping up [...] and Franchina answers the ringing phone, it was July she says, I am not supposed to come to San Marino, what does it even mean? That you and only you are going and because there is not enough sits at the table, I say come on, she disappears with Gabri who says motherly come with me and in the meantime I drop the portcullis, that fluidly descends and we go. In the dark road where the lights on seem off,

because in Milan, at nightfall, look out. Illumination is actually an infernal darkness.⁶⁰

6.6 Chapter summary

If chapter 5 contextualised the Libreria project into the wider ‘pratica del fare’ framework, this chapter reconstructed the key moments in Libreria early phases, from the inception phases in 1974, presenting the process of fundraising and call for support, idea sharing and communication activities to the foundation of the cooperative and the opening in 1975. In doing so the chapter on the one hand reconstructed the history of set up of Libreria and its relations and on the other shed light on the process of entwinement between political vision and organising, allowing to look at how this very relationship was conceptualised and expressed at the project dawning moment. While this chapter, which closes part II of the dissertation unravelled mainly through analysing historical documents, the next chapter will constitute an “immersion” in Libreria theorising activity carried out through analysis of some seminal textual productions of Libreria itself.

⁶⁰ Tomasi 1980, extracts from *Comportamento abituale*, pp. 11-7.

PART III

The field study. Milan Women's Bookstore: practices, theories, organising

Part III is composed by three chapters that together form a picture representing the Bookstore life in its concrete, daily activities and work practices, highlighting both its projects and publications. The idea is to present in the same section both the ideational and organisational aspects of the life of the organisation.

Chapter 7 is an analysis of the key texts and publications of the bookstore, done in order to extract the key theories and political practices elaborated by the space.

Chapter 8 is a photograph of how the bookstore is run and of its key activities. The chapter also present an unreleased archival document constituting the member's narration on the story and meaning of organising practices of the bookstore.

Chapter 9 is staged in a more recent history of the organisation, and narrates two events occurring at the turn of the century, the bookstore moves to a different location and its adoption of a website. The two moments are used as narrative devices to talk about patterns of spatial organisation and its meaning, membership and decision making as well as to glimpse at how the organisation is coping with technological changes.

Chapter 7

The intellectual life of *Libreria*: texts and theories

The Milan Women's Bookstore opened its doors in October 1975 and at the same time started its commercial and political work, in the form of meetings and debates but also its written production. This chapter analyses the key publications and editorial productions of the *Libreria*: the *Green Catalogue* (*Catalogo Verde*, 1978) and *Yellow Catalogue* (*Catalogo Giallo*, 1982), the paper *Via Dogana* (1981), the *Green Sottosopra* journal (*Sottosopra Verde*, 1983) and the book *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (1987).¹ Since its inception, the *Libreria* has understood itself and its role as going beyond the activities of a bookstore. As the historical reconstruction presented in the previous chapters shows, it was considered a space like “any other shop”:² open to the public and tasked with selling books. From the beginning, however, this commercial activity was understood as intrinsically political, not only by virtue of the bookstore's ‘mission’ of salvaging and showcasing women's cultural production of the past and present, but also “for the simple reason that women can meet here instead of withdrawing into the private sphere and avoiding the subordination of their own interests to those of institutions and organisations”.³ The political element was thus connected, in the writings of the collective, to the content of its commercial activity (women's books) and to the fact that

¹ *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* 1987. The book has been translated into English by Teresa De Lauretis and Patricia Cicogna (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990).

² Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne*, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Manifesti”, 1.3. B. 1. F1.

³ *Ibid.*

it included a public meeting space. The political dimension of the *Libreria* is also to be found in the crucial role it came to play as a centre for the production of political and philosophical reflection, hosting issue-specific debate groups and seminars and publishing political theory texts.

As Bono and Kemp (1991) point out in their study:

The Libreria is on the one hand, obviously, a bookshop, that is a 'public' space and an enterprise subject to economic laws; on the other hand, as a 'women's bookshop', it inevitably has a political dimension. this political dimension is particularly important; in fact, the women of the Libreria have been and are a significant point of reference for any political and theoretical debate in the feminist movement. Their writings have been very influential in shaping this debate, and the issues of their irregular publication, *Sottosopra*, have always aroused great interest and provoked discussion. (Bono and Kemp 1991: 109)

The aim of the chapter is to give an overview, through some key texts, of *Libreria* 'intellectual' life.⁴ Each text presented will be employed as a nodal point from which to derive and explain some of the main political positions developed by the *Libreria*. Therefore, the structure of the chapter interweaves a presentation of the publications with a focus on the meaning of the texts produced. In connection with this analysis, I also present two organisations related to *Libreria* theoretical production, framing them as examples of traces left by the ideas produced at the *Libreria*: the Parma Women's Library (*Biblioteca delle Donne di Parma*) (cf. section 7.1.2) and *Diotima*, the women's philosophical community (*Comunità filosofica femminile Diotima*) based in Verona (cf. 7.3.1). As the *Libreria* also develops feminist theory in its

⁴ Cf. sections 7.1 to 7.4.

“strictly philosophical aspects” (Restaino 2002: 70) (cf. section 7.5), the concluding section of this chapter presents an overview of some elements of Feminism of Sexual Difference as seen in the thought of Luisa Muraro, who, as already stated (cf. chapter 6) is among the founders of the *Libreria delle Donne*.

7.1 The writing of the first text by the Boosktore: the Green and Yellow Catalogues

7.1.1 On the critique of feminism as an ideology, and on the practice of collective writing

The first *Libreria* production dates to 1978, with the text *Sulla servitù della scrittura. E sulle sue grandi possibilità. Catalogo di testi di teoria e pratica politica*, often referred to simply as the *Green Catalogue*.⁵ Put together by the “Catalogue Group”, it consists of a selection of texts which are key for the feminist movement and is organised as follows:

- an introductory section on the meaning of the book,
- a central section presenting and analysing a selection of early feminist texts,
- a concluding section that reflects on the meaning of collective writing.

The introduction explains the motivations behind the publication: this presentation of and reflection on the catalogue was carried out with the intention of highlighting a serious risk involved in approaching

⁵ *Sulla servitù della scrittura. E sulle sue grandi possibilità. Catalogo di testi di teoria e pratica politica*, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 6. The archive contains the catalogue as well as the preparatory texts and notes.

feminist production, namely the risk of ideology, understood here as the passive use of books to identify a generic “feminist point of view”. The introductory section states:

The idea of making the catalogue stemmed from spending time in the *Libreria delle donne di Milano*. We noticed [in customers] a preference for books explicitly and famously feminist (in the bookstore there is everything provided that is written by a woman). We grew tired of these very books because they tend to be repetitive while we were and still are drawn to collective texts, connected directly to concrete women’s experiences or to books that are thought without pre-constituted ideological schemes, for example novels (of course there can be, there are beginning to be feminist novels as well...). After reflecting on this we wrote a leaflet, that is put up in Libreria and that we are reproducing below – we wrote in parenthesis the additions to the text we wrote while it was on display.

*There is no such thing as a feminist point of view. [...] Instead of producing ideas through collective modification of reality there is content in absorbing a world’s vision from “feminist” books. In this way the movement is reduced to a cultural fact. Movement’s texts used in this way serve as confirmation and as censorship. [...] Ideology, namely, the political discourse that has lost bonds with reality – is very chatty, but produces repetitively illusions and consolations, in other words, leaves the things as they are. We need theory and this is to be gained from each and every woman through political practice (why only political?). Everyone is competent, there are no authorities nor authors.*⁶

⁶ The use of italics is respecting the original format of the book. The text cited, *Non esiste un punto di vista femminista*, was written in 1977 and is conserved at ALM at FD, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 12 and at ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.

After stating the purpose of their writing, specifically to analyse “some books and documents directly linked to the birth and development of the women’s movement”, they proceed by explaining how they organised their work.

We agree upon distributing notes took during the books’ discussions and then re-elaborating them according to the liking or disliking of each one of us, so that there is pleasure in talking and writing about them (loving pleasure, polemical pleasure). Each one then will go through the individual writings of the others, with the possibility of doing some interpolations, changing words, adding ideas, keeping in mind what has been said and what has not, even beyond the debate on the book into analysis.

The issue of text interpolation raises further self-reflections in a section that ponders if this practice should be devoted to clarifying the text for the reader (*interpolazione sulla scrittura*) or, rather, if the act of entering into another’s text should have the purpose of pointing out a different take on the issue (*interpolazione sul contenuto*).

We don’t want to assume univocal positions but show the diversity of our positions, even emphasising it, as “one position illuminates the other”. And this is not an exercise in tolerance but a mirror of our practice of debate [*pratica di confronto*].

At the same time, and with this point they conclude the introduction, the authors feel the need to also present some issues on which they agree. The central section consists in analysis of feminist texts and essays conceived as preparatory step for reaching their “most vivid

desire”: to study and discuss novelists, a desire that took form in 1982 with the text *Le madri di tutte noi*, the so-called *Yellow Catalogue*.⁷

The *Green Catalogue* is an example of the type of reflection and activities carried out at the *Libreria*. “The polemics against «ideological feminism» was a regular component of the political work carried out in Milan for several years in 1975” (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 85).⁸ This is the first line of a section of *Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* whose title is straightforward in its argument: *Against Ideological Feminism*. A multifaceted critique of feminism as ideology is, in fact, a cornerstone of the positions taken by *Libreria delle*

⁷ Libreria delle Donne di Milano e Biblioteca delle Donne di Parma, Catalogo N. 2, *Romanzi. Le madri di tutte noi*, 1982.

⁸ The reflection on feminism and ideology was a discussion that Milanese feminists shared with the French feminists of the group *Psychanalyse et Politique*, founded by Antoinette Fouque. Lia Cigarini, one of the founders of the *Libreria*, in the introduction to Antoinette Fouque book *I sessi sono due* underlines how much the French group influenced the Milanese one in understanding the risk behind an ideological take on feminism and in overcoming the idea of unity and sameness among women (Cigarini 1999).

The relevance of the French group is also stated in *Non credere*. In the opening lines of the paragraph on ideology there is a reference to the French group *Psychanalyse et Politique* with whom the Milanese debated the issue of feminism as ideology. The French, the chapter narrates, held that all feminism is ideological, while the Milanese thought that “feminism can deteriorate into ideology” (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990: 85-9)

The relationship with “Psy et Po” has been very significant for the Milanese groups for other reasons as well. Notably, the French collective founded the Paris Women’s Bookstore, from which the women of the Milan Bookstore drew inspiration (cf. chapter 6 for a discussion of this). I found other traces of this relationship in my archival work. In the *Libreria* Archive at Fondazione Badaracco there are various leaflets and manifestos of books published by *Des Femmes* and some *des femmes mouvements* calendars (ALD at FB, Milan, section “Manifesti”, *Des Femmes*, 1977-1978, Paris, 3.3. B. 1, F. 5).

Donne. In the aforementioned subchapter of *Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, the authors retrospectively went through some of their own key texts in order to offer a synthetic overview of what they meant by ideology. Ideology, they argue, is thought that overlooks reality and is therefore ineffective in terms of bringing about political change. It has three aspects, according to the authors: first, ideology is “political discourse which no longer has ties with reality”, secondly, Ideological Feminism is comprehended not only as the “lack of political practice” but more specifically the lack of a distinctively feminist political practice. That is to say, a multifaceted and multi-voiced practice shaped according to the different positions comprising the women’s movement.

Thirdly, ideology means accepting simplified thought instead of considering the complexity of reality and, in particular in this context, the reality of women’s conditions.⁹ “The female condition is

⁹ There is a trace of the critique of ideology as the fixity of objectives and programs and a means of covering up differences within the movement in the use of the expression *movimento delle donne* instead of *femminismo*. The first, “women’s movement”, indicates dynamism and plurality, composed of different subjects speaking, while the second, “feminism”, has a less dynamic connotation. This emerged clearly in my interview with Giordana Masotto, one of the founders of *Libreria* and the first librarian. She explained that some women at the time opted for the definition “women’s movement” rather than “feminism” in order to convey their distance from the possible ideological perception imbued in the word “feminist”. “I like it even more... but then of course ‘feminist’ is fine especially now that they say that feminism is dead etc. But in the expression ‘women’s movement’... women are subjects, they are women that make a movement. It is not a label. They are subjects taking the liberty to speak [*dei soggetti che prendono la parola*] in the public sphere. That is why conceptually I prefer ‘women’s movement’, and back then it had also a connotation of... it determined a slightly different positioning” (interview with Giordana Masotto, 15th December 2017, Bocconi University, Milan).

entangled in various clusters of problems and contradictions which should not be isolated, denied, or eluded. When this has happened in the past ... there was stagnation, and ideology emerged, with purely imaginary solutions".¹⁰

Considering the group's practice, their reflection on ideology has two fundamental implications. First, it is connected to the critique of culture they develop. It is not by chance that their reflections on ideology appear in two texts (*Non esiste un punto di vista femminista* and *Catalogo Verde*) about books.¹¹ The ideological stance here is closely connected to an idea of cultural production as formatted and

Moreover, the leaflet about the imminent opening of the *Libreria* (*Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...*, Circolo cooperativo "Sibilla Aleramo" – Libreria delle Donne, 18th December 1974, 1 facciata [d], ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2), which *Non credere* (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987: 102) also comments on, appears in a 1974 draft version in the Muraro archive (ALM at FB, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1). Besides many interesting annotations, comments and changes (which I believe in part constituted the key annotation for the writing of *Non credere* in 1987, but which unfortunately I cannot present here in detail), the document includes a comment testifying to the way the word "feminism" came to be used later on, while in the early stages the word "movement" is used. Muraro underlines the utilisation of the expression "il movimento delle donne", noting in the margin <(non "femminismo")>.

¹⁰ The first position is developed by analysing the pamphlet *Non esiste un punto di vista femminista* and, the authors point out, is in line with the traditional conception of ideology as developed by the "Marxist Left", considering ideology to be a "ready-made discourse" that has no ties with reality and the ideas that stem from it. The second one is expressed in the document *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi* (cf. chapter 5 where this text is analysed in depth). The third meaning they attribute to ideology in the context of feminism is extracted by analysing the *Green Catalogue* (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 85-7). Ellipsis in the original.

¹¹ Cf. previous note.

prescriptive (for example, writing feminist essays) and cultural consumption that is passive, delegating political agency and transformation to others.¹² For example, in a moment in which collective reflections and practices were regarded as key elements for acquiring political consciousness, the practice of collective writing was predominant. In fact, there are passages of *Non esiste un punto di vista femminista* that frame authorial writing (a writing that is not collective) as “theft” from the collective of women.¹³ The sphere of culture is therefore the sphere most severely criticised and yet, it is also the sphere that *Libreria* women decided to bet on and invest their efforts in,

¹² Modification, transformation and learning as passages that can only be carried out through personal effort is the key methodological element extracted by *autocoscienza* (cf. chapp. 4 and 5), and in fact, when reflecting on this notion Maria Luisa Boccia says that without it “feminism would have been remained just an ideology” (Boccia 1990: 195).

¹³ It should be noted that Carla Lonzi was reflecting on cultural production in the same period, producing a critique of authorial stance as mystification of relational work and a critique of Ideological Feminism. In fact, the second manifesto of *Rivolta Femminile*, *I say I*, is dated 1977, and this text takes issue with the women’s movement in its ideological stances. This manifesto is analysed in the *Non credere*, in the subchapter devoted to the analysis of feminism as ideology, right after the *Libreria*’s own texts.

Libreria women knew and read Carla Lonzi. For example, in the *Green Catalogue* (1978) I have analysed, the feminist texts treated include some books by *Rivolta Femminile*: *È già politica* (1977) and *La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale* (1970). Nevertheless, although both *Libreria* and *Rivolta Femminile* criticise Ideological Feminism, I think the differences in their motivations and the meanings attached to the word ‘ideology’ require further investigation. For example, there is a passage in Lonzi’s diary (Lonzi 1978: 847-8) in which she harshly criticises Ideological Feminism but refers to *Librairie des Femmes* in Paris and criticises the use of psychoanalysis (citing Freud and Lacan) “imposed on feminists by feminist thinkers”. The reference to “Psy et Po” is implicit but evident.

via their writing practices and experiments, studies and analyses of texts, and concrete projects.

In fact, the second practical implication of this critique of ideology is related to the *Libreria*'s practice in managing the bookstore. If ideology is discourse with no interest in or relationship with reality, then non-ideological discourse must be as materially grounded and close to experience as possible.¹⁴ It is here that we find the meaning of the attention devoted to the link between 'theory and practice'. Once it had been written, the above-mentioned pamphlet *Non esiste un punto di vista femminista* was hung on the *Libreria* wall as a material inscription – or perhaps simply a reminder – of *Libreria* ideals, to be verified in practice, associated with the running of a bookstore. In fact, the *Libreria* started to sell only novels, instead of feminist pamphlets,¹⁵ as a direct consequence of the positions they took against Ideological Feminism as expressed in the 1977 pamphlet. This same point appears in a 1983 document where the women explain how they decided to sell only novels as a reaction to the fact that feminism, understood as a 'genre', was becoming an editorial trend.¹⁶ In this sense, the 'practice of doing' (cf. chapter 5), highlighting the connection between political positions and practical decisions in the organising life of the *Libreria*, is a formula positioned in opposition to that of Ideological Feminism.

The practice of doing opposed that simplifying tendency [the one of ideology] [...] for it gathered together women who were not

¹⁴ 'Materiality' is a word often used by *Libreria* and it was also used in the context of their critique of ideology. For example, as discourse that does not take into consideration "materiality of life" (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 86, quoting their *Green Catalogue*).

¹⁵ I do not have information regarding the time span in which this 'novel only' policy was in place. Nowadays the *Libreria*'s collection includes not only novels but also feminist essays and other genres.

¹⁶ The text is *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, B. 10, F. 1).

necessarily bound to one another by affection or familiarity, or rallied by succinct slogans, but who were unified instead by a common project, to which each of them was committed for her own reasons, her own desired and abilities, putting them to the test of a collective implementation. (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 86)

Looking at the architecture of *Non credere*, it becomes clear that the text is arranged as follows: first a subchapter presenting and defining the 'practice of doing' (*The Practice of Doing*); then a subchapter providing a digression on the critique of ideology in feminism (*Against Ideological Feminism*) and, lastly, the project of *Libreria delle Donne* is introduced (*The Milan Bookstore and the Parma Library*). Interpreting the fabric of the chapter in this way, *Libreria delle Donne* is a practical endeavour connected to the cultural sphere (as both seller and producer of books) which entails a collective form of management that grants material foundations to the effort of developing feminism not as ideology but as practice.

7.1.2 On genealogies

If the *Green Catalogue* is an exploration on feminist essays and represents an example of the way in which the group conducted research and political work, practising their critique of feminism as ideology, the *Yellow Catalogue*, consisting in analyses and comments on women novelists, is considered a key expression of the group's research on female genealogies. This catalogue, written together with the women of Women's Library of Parma (cf. next section), is another collective reflection on a set of texts (this time novels rather than feminist essays) with the research objective of identifying traces that can be followed in order to construct a "feminine symbolic" (*simbolico femminile*), a different vision of the world that, perhaps, the great writers of the past let slip through their writings.

On one hand, the *Libreria* women's genealogic work reflects a research orientation that is common to feminist philosophies: as political philosopher Maria Luisa Boccia has pointed out (2002), genealogic work, as modelled by Michel Foucault, has always been a starting point for feminist theories in that their political search for new horizons of possibility for the present has always been connected (although carried out in different ways according to the different theoretical orientations found in feminist theory) to a critical reconsideration of the (Western) intellectual tradition, shedding light on the "phallogocratic" or "patriarchal" order structured as an alliance among men. On the other hand, *Libreria* women move from genealogic work, understood as archaeological work investigating the conditions of possibility for knowledge to be generated and subjects of discourse to be identified, to embark on a research project aimed at constructing new genealogies to which to refer. Genealogic work in this sense is a search for traces of women agency and words, for female subjects ("mothers") that were capable of articulating autonomous discourse even within the patriarchal order.

Libreria women articulated their research project and political practices on female genealogies setting off from the recognition, as Teresa De Lauretis (1990) explains, that "the intellectual and social traditions of Western culture are male genealogies, where, as in Lacan's symbolic, women have no place" (De Lauretis 1990: 2) – in which "having no place" also means lacking representation and the means to represent oneself.¹⁷ In a passage of the collective text *Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* they write:

¹⁷ In this case, I synthetically refer only to the work of the *Libreria* on the concept of genealogies. Philosopher Teresa De Lauretis explains that the group work has been in dialogue with different intellectual traditions and authors: engaging in a critical manner with works by Hegel and Lacan, dialoguing with Kristeva's and Luce Irigaray's production and drawing on works by Adrienne Rich. A richer reference that is constructed by commenting Muraro's but that also applies to the *Libreria*'s collective work on genealogies is offered by

The study of linguistics informs us that the root *gen* in words such as *genus*, *genealogy*, *generation* characterizes words traditionally associated with birth as a social event, and strictly speaking, it refers to the legitimate birth of male individuals. In our culture, as Luce Irigaray has pointed out, the representation of the mother-daughter relationship is missing; a mother always carries a son in her arms. [...] Anthropologists tell us that human society is based on exchange of signs, goods, and women. It is a strange way of representing things, an artificial, scientifically simple way of hiding the horrible disorder caused by the domination of one sex by the other, the violent destruction of relations between women. Starting with the mother-daughter relationship, which is often accompanied by a woman not being able to control her own production, and which is nearly always connected with a woman's difficulty in producing original signs: with whom, after all, can she exchange them; what can they signify? (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 25-6)

The excerpt above, positioned in the first page of the book to convey its centrality in relation to the *Libreria's* overall production, indicates the nature of the research project on genealogies: it is at once a theoretical and political research. The *representation* of women, their bonds and intellectual contribution in the past, *signification* and cultural production in the present, and attention to concrete *relationships* are intertwined in a project whose aim can be summarised as a search for a "symbolic placement" in which "symbolic" signals the centrality of the focus on language, and "placement" indicates the historical nature of the project, aimed at constructing a legible and solid tradition of intellectual production by women.

Timothy S. Murphy in his introduction to the English edition of Muraro's 1991 text *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* (Murphy 2018).

Concretely, to paraphrase De Lauretis the work on genealogies consisted in:

- a research agenda: a work on literary figures which involved reading and re-reading their work so as to construct a frame of reference for one's reflections;
- a political practice: the research enters into day-to-day practices among women via the use of political strategies aimed at reinforcing women's practices of citing, referencing and trusting one another (for example the practice of *affidamento*, explored in the next section).

It is evident from the points above that the critical work on the patriarchal symbolic order is intended as preliminary project providing the grounds for a positive endeavour: the group "generated, engendered" (De Lauretis 1990: 2) a genealogy of women. How did the group carry out this task? Primarily by writing a book, *Non credere*, which describes the practices invented in the women's movement, and by constructing a historical account of Italian Feminism.¹⁸ At any rate, this book is only one of many others projects¹⁹ that exemplify the pattern previously identified according to which even the most sophisticated theoretical discussions have a practical side, and are granted material form through an activity. The reconstruction of a genealogy of women, the quest for symbolic mothers, and the search for a new language went on to find fulfilment with the 1991 work by

¹⁸ I will delve into the meaning of this book in section 7.4.

¹⁹ The creation of the bookstore itself is the most evident materialisation of this research, being a place where intellectual production of women is valorised and preserved. Other projects, carried out following the research agenda on genealogies are, for example, the creation of an archive in the bookstore premises, or the move to online made by younger generations (both projects will be presented in the following chapter).

Luisa Muraro, *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* (*L'ordine simbolico della madre*).²⁰

7.1.3 Relationship with other organisations: Parma Women's Library

The *Yellow Catalogue* also represents a concrete example of collaboration between the Milan Women's Bookshop and the Parma Women's Library, by virtue of shared research and political development. Laura Minguzzi, currently president of the *Circolo della Rosa* (the club connected to *Libreria* organising events and public programs, cf. chapter 8) and previously a member of the Parma Library, recalls how some of the Parma women would come every Thursday to take part in the meetings held in the *sottoscala*, the "cellar" of Via Dogana, to prepare the *Catalogo Giallo*.²¹ The *Catalogo Giallo* was then published in 1982 and, a year later, the *Biblioteca* and *Libreria* went on to continue their common project of political development: a press release dated 2nd June 1983 cites the Parma library as publisher, together with the Milan Bookshop, of the very first *Via Dogana* magazine, issue zero of which appeared in 1983.²² In the following years, the Parma women also participated in the meetings to draft the book *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, another testimony to the close relation between the two organisations. Recalling the experience, Laura Minguzzi told me:

²⁰ Cf. section 7.5.

²¹ The "Thursday meetings" (*le riunioni del giovedì*) are a quite intriguing phenomenon mentioned repeatedly in numerous interviews. Since the Seventies, some of the *Libreria's* key meetings have taken place on Thursdays and nowadays the editorial meeting for the website is also on Thursday.

²² "Mercoledì 1 giugno presso La libreria delle donne di Milano, via dogana 2, è stato presentato il numero zero di una nuova pubblicazione periodica, intitolata "Via Dogana", edita dalla Libreria delle Donne di Milano e dalla Biblioteca delle donne di Parma. La rivista si occupa di libri e di politica delle donne" (press release dated 2nd June 1983, Milan, conserved in ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 5).

We were there, in that smoky basement [*sottoscala affumicato*] [laughs], full, you could not breath, huge debates, it was very exciting also... I was coming from Parma, the meeting was taking place around 6pm and then around 8.30 we would go have dinner together and then we [the Parma group] would leave with the 10pm train [...] Yes, because the day after I had to work! [...] We used to arrive in Parma around midnight – high speed train were not a thing back then. We used to go to the *Cicip* [the feminist cultural centre *Cicip&Ciciap*]²³ and from there we were taking the metro to go the railway station.²⁴

The two organisations had a relationship not only by virtue of their common reflections, but also because of the practical support that the *Libreria* offered in constituting the *Biblioteca*. The *Biblioteca delle Donne* di Parma project started in the second half of the Seventies thanks to a group of women, some of whom would later become part of *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano.²⁵

²³ *Cicip&Ciciap* is a Milan-based, feminist cultural centre and restaurant. It was founded in 1981 by Nadia Riva and Daniela Pellegrini. *Cicip&Ciciap* was a separatist space, as it was women-only and it did not allow men to enter its premises. Many of my interviews reference *Cicip&Ciciap*, often referring to it as *Cicip*, as a meeting place; it is depicted as a place women would go, often after meetings, to have dinner. For a personal memory of the relevance of *Cicip&Ciciap* in the feminist *milieu*, cf. also Lepetit 2016: 104-9.

²⁴ Interview with Laura Minguzzi (today the president of the *Circolo della Rosa*), 13th and 14th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

²⁵ Rosaria Guacci (a long-time collaborator of *La Tartaruga*, cf. chapter 5, section 3), Laura Minguzzi and Pat Carra (the humourist and creator of *Libreria delle Donne*'s *Aspirina* satirical journal. There are other women who also participated in the foundation and life of the *Biblioteca*. Of these, the names that I retrieved from my interviews with Laura Minguzzi and Rosaria Guacci are: Daniela Rossi, Pat Bonino, Fiorenza Bonino, Margherita Brava, Teresa Serra, and Letizia

At the beginning we were 3-4 feminists coming from the Lotta Continua Manifesto. You know, when the famous leakage from the mixed groups happened [...] Sofri, in Lotta Continua, used to call it “to live with the earthquake” – the earthquake was us, women. I was part of the Manifesto, but in leaving it – the *Libreria* was already founded, it was happening in the same years – we thought: let’s do something similar. We did not have the strength or the means to set up a bookstore [...] and so we thought that doing a library could have been an interesting way to gather women beyond a movement type of aggregation [*movimentismo*], of which we had enough [*stava iniziando a stufare*].²⁶

The *Biblioteca* was thus “inspired by” *Libreria*, as Laura Minguzzi recalls as well.²⁷ Laura explained that, at the moment conceiving this enterprise, the desires and objective of the founders were different (it was, in fact, a composite reality composed of feminists from different backgrounds);²⁸ some wished to set up a Woman’s House, some an anti-violence centre, and others a library.

Here, when the *Libreria* opened in 1975, we were debating about the importance of the bookstore, that is of having books, a mediating object [*un oggetto di mezzo*], “to put an object between

Artoni. These are the names that I retrieved, but it is possible that other women also spent time at the library and took part in its activities.

²⁶ Interview with Rosaria Guacci, 7th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

²⁷ Interview with Laura Minguzzi, 13th and 14th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

²⁸ The library was founded not only by separatist feminists, but also by women from leftist political aggregations such as the Italian Communist Party, UDI and Unions (I do not have more specific information on which unions).

us”, we used to say it, as a practice [smiles], and about the women’s writing, symbolic sphere, etc. [...] [some were saying] “books are important, let’s stay connected to Milan..”, and others were saying “we don’t feel, we don’t have this relation with Milan, we are not interested in it...”.²⁹

According to Laura’s account, then, the idea of setting up the library was connected to both the discourse on *pratica del fare* and the landmark work represented by the Milan bookstore. The library was run on the basis of voluntary shifts, like the Milan bookstore, and sustained by donations from both library members themselves (what Rosaria Guacci calls *autotassazione*) and other women in Parma.

The *Libreria* was not only a source of inspiration, but played also a crucial role in concretely setting up the *Biblioteca*. Rosaria Guacci explains in her interview that it was thanks to *Libreria* support and connections in the publishing field that the *Biblioteca* was able to assemble its catalogue.³⁰

Parma Women’s Library has always had Milan Women’s Bookstore as reference point, also for having advices, addresses to have free books. You see the library set-up was a zero money, completely autonomous, small town effort, so we managed to set it up with zero money and we had the possibility of going around asking publishers, donations, books thanks to the good relations with the women of *Libreria*. [...] Sometimes I was going to take them [the books] with my own purse, or they were sending them to us. But the relationship has always been

²⁹ Interview with Laura Minguzzi, 13th and 14th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

³⁰ Interview with Laura Minguzzi, 13th and 14th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan. Laura Minguzzi said that *La Tartaruga* was also giving them free books but Guacci did not recall this point.

mediated by *Libreria delle Donne*. I was saying I am Rosaria Guacci, Lia [Lia Cigarini, one of the founders of *Libreria*] is sending me, and everyone was listening, because Lia is a historical figure.³¹

The *Biblioteca* created its own magazine, *Un posto al centro*, the title of which references the desire to secure a central space in the city, a project that was never realised. The organisation instead settled in a rented room in the *Oltretorrente Parmense*. It was open only in the afternoon, and political meetings took place in the evenings. In fact, the *Biblioteca* was composed of different discussion groups (on literature, sexuality, relations with institutions, etc.) and hosted public meetings.³² Both the presence of political groups within the organisation and the perceived importance of the space, conceived as a strategic and symbolic dimension of the enterprise, were key ideas linking the Parma project to the concepts central to the *Libreria*.

The Parma Library project faded out a few years later (I do not have information on the exact year, but it closed in the Eighties) for various reasons and internal dynamics having to do with the group's organisation.³³

³¹ Interview with Rosaria Guacci, 7th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

³² For example, in 1983 the women of the library organised a conference together with Istituto Gramsci featuring Luce Irigaray.

³³ There were conflicts regarding the political orientation of *Biblioteca* on this matter, for example there was not a complete consensus around the *affidamento* practice. Some women were already going to Milan, it proved impossible to sustain the system of volunteer shifts and the development process started to lose momentum.

The *Biblioteca* donated its book collection to Archivio della Biblioteca delle Donne "Mauretta Pelagatti", which closed in 1997 when it merged with the

7.2 The creation of the Bookstore magazine “*Via Dogana*”.

Via Dogana, the street where the bookstore was located, gave its name to the first magazine published by the *Libreria*. The magazine, as the subtitle *Rivista di pratica politica* expresses, is devoted to discussions of politics, contemporaneity and political practices. This focus was oriented in different ways in the magazine’s different phases of publication. In fact, *Via Dogana*, in the format of a set of collective reviews of feminist texts, was published quarterly between 1983 and 1984 and sold as subscription for 6,000 liras for 4 issues or in the bookshop for 1,500 liras for a single copy. It then underwent a second phase from 1991 to 2014 in which the journal acquired more ‘traditional’ features, characterised by authored articles explicitly focused on contemporary political issues. In 2014 it entered a third life phase involving the transition from print to online publishing through the *Via Dogana 3* project.

The first series of *Via Dogana* created by *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano and *Biblioteca delle Donne* di Parma was a composite book review written by the editorial staff. The project of researching and reviewing contemporary texts, proposing interpretations that diverged from the “trends and the reviews, oftentimes influenced by powerful publishing houses”,³⁴ was presented in the editorial of “Number Zero” of *Via Dogana* (May 1983), entitled “Some Woman Said That Before Me, For Me” (*Qualcuna lo ha detto per me prima di me*; cf. image 12).³⁵

Ugo Balestrazzi Library [<http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/category/site-amiche/> – last accessed 16-02-2019].

³⁴ The complete series is conserved at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 6. The very first text analysed by the *Via Dogana* Number Zero was Carla Lonzi’s newly published *Vai pure. Dialogo con Pietro Consagra*.

³⁵ The title is a clear reference to the genealogy research.

Via Dogana

Numero 0, maggio 1983, L. 1.500

Qualcuna lo ha detto per me prima di me

In questo foglio intitolato « Via Dogana », che uscirà ogni tre mesi e che si può avere per abbonamento o comprandolo nelle librerie delle donne, parleremo di libri perché i libri sono legati ad altre cose che c'interessano quanto e più dei libri.

C'interessa la lotta delle donne e i guadagni che ne possono venire in fatto di libertà, intelligenza, piacere. Anche in fatto di cultura potrà esserci guadagno, ma non è il nostro punto di partenza come non è il nostro scopo principale.

« Via Dogana » è pubblicata da un gruppo che si ritrova nella Libreria delle donne di Milano e nella Biblioteca delle donne di Parma. È aperta alla collaborazione di tutte quelle che lo desiderano e che si metteranno in contatto con noi.

Nella Libreria e nella Biblioteca abbiamo notato che molte, per i libri da leggere, si fanno indirizzare dalla moda del momento e dalle recensioni dei giornali. Le mode e le recensioni sono spesso dettate dalle case editrici forti sul mercato e, in ogni caso, seguono criteri in cui i nostri reali interessi c'entrano ben poco.

Da queste constatazioni ci è venuta l'idea di pubblicare « Via Dogana ».

Quando abbiamo tentato di appropriarci della cultura, essendo confuse circa i nostri interessi, abbiamo sostenuto in realtà le imprese della mente maschile, senza vero guadagno per noi. Avere presenti i propri interessi vuole dire avere il senso della parzialità. L'essere umano è una parzialità perché non esiste come tale, esiste fondamentalmente come essere donna/uomo. Questa è la più elementare spartizione, che gli uomini hanno

voluto negare negando l'essere donna e che le donne rischiano d'ignorare identificandosi con gli interessi degli uomini travestiti di parole universali.

Per ragionare avendo presenti i nostri interessi di donne, noi ci basiamo su una pratica politica di parzialità. La nostra pratica consiste essenzialmente nel liberare tempo, energie, intelligenza, passione per noi, sottraendone la maggior parte possibile ai mariti, agli amanti, ai figli, ai capi, alle nostre fantasie, come alle varie cause promosse da uomini.

Nei rapporti tra donne si trova piacere e intelligenza. Ma non si deve mitizzare, perché c'è anche povertà. Il gruppo separato di donne è anche un luogo dove si ripresentano gli effetti di un'oppressione sociale che impoverisce le donne. Queste quasi sempre sono culturalmente subordinate e difficilmente possono competere con gli uomini nelle prestazioni sociali. Il gruppo politico è povero ma non è subordinato.

Così siamo noi che facciamo questo foglio. Tra noi alcune hanno a che fare quotidianamente con la cultura della carta stampata mentre altre sono marginali o esterne, ma ciò non costituisce una differenza significativa: riconosciamo, le une come le altre, che non abbiamo padronanza sulla produzione culturale. Abbiamo abbastanza sicurezza in noi stesse per riconoscere che siamo povere.

La scelta di parzialità, perdipiù, ci fa guardare con sospetto ai prodotti dell'arte e del pensiero umano. Ci è sospetta la loro universalità. Qualcuna potrà obiettare che in questo modo perdiamo una possibilità oggi offerta anche alle donne, e che ci costringiamo in un piccolo spazio; le scrittrici infatti sono poche, il mondo è pieno di prodotti della mente maschile.

Noi pensiamo invece che povertà e costrizione ci facciano guadagnare perché ci portano ad avere un orecchio sensibile nel cogliere quello che altre nostre simili hanno saputo dire del mondo.

Qui sta un principio di ricchezza di cui dobbiamo riuscire ad appropriarci. Il dire, della cosa che stai cercando di dire, « qualcun'altra per me lo ha già detto », smuove l'immagine di povertà e fa nascere l'immagine di una ricchezza possibile. Il rimando alle parole di un'altra, parole già dette che aspettano di essere riprese, dà realmente la parola all'essere corpo di donna. Invece delle fantasie interne, subentra il fatto di una conferma data e ricevuta. Prende così a formarsi una trama che dà consistenza a quello che altrimenti è esperienza muta.

Non viene spontaneo fare riferimento alle parole di una propria simile. Arrivarci costituisce forse il passo più importante della nostra politica.

Con questo criterio ragioneremo sui libri. Sicuramente è un criterio parziale; talvolta potrà capitare che risulti deformante, ma non è il caso di temere qualche lieve deformazione noi che,

obbedendo ai criteri di affermata universalità, rischiamo deformazioni ben più pesanti.

Nei libri, come in altre cose dette o fatte da donne – convegni, riviste, musica, cinema, ecc. – cerchiamo i punti di rispondenza con noi. Scoprire tale rispondenza ci dà la forza della conferma. Di quelle donne eccezionali che riescono a mettersi in rapporto con il mondo in maniera originale, vogliamo fare le nostre madri. Anche quando ci capiterà di criticarle, sarà solo per farle nostre. Le loro parole, non le tratteremo come prodotti culturali; vogliamo piuttosto che siano un trauma che scuote la mente liberandola dalla subordinazione e dall'impotenza, esattamente come riescono a fare certi avvenimenti che hanno luogo dentro la testa come fuori della testa. Ci interessa far esistere quel mondo comune delle donne di cui abbiamo già parlato nel « Sottosopra » intitolato *Più donne che uomini*.

Per fare l'abbonamento a « Via Dogana » usare il modulo allegato intestato a Circolo Coop. S. Aleramo s.r.l., Via Dogana 2, 20123 Milano, Conto corrente n. 26601203.

L'abbonamento a quattro numeri costa 6.000 lire; chi lo sottoscrive riceverà in omaggio un volume della casa editrice La Tartaruga.

Fare l'abbonamento è la migliore forma di sostegno.

Per comprare « Via Dogana », rivolgersi alle seguenti librerie:

Milano Libreria delle donne, Via Dogana 2
Bologna Librellula, Strada Maggiore 23
Roma Al Tempo ritrovato, Piazza Farnese 103
Cagliari Libreria delle donne, Via Lanusei 15
Pisa Libreria Mariposa, Via Fucini 13
Firenze Libreria Cooperativa delle donne, Via Fiesolana 2
Parma Biblioteca delle donne, Via XX Settembre 31

Per ogni comunicazione, indirizzare a:

Redazione di « Via Dogana », presso Libreria delle donne,
Via Dogana 2, 20123 Milano. Oppure telefonare: (02) 87 42 13.

Il gruppo di redazione si riunisce ogni mercoledì alle ore 18
in Via Dogana 2, Milano.

The editorial explains that the idea of reflecting on women's books came about because women in the group, regardless of their level of information, cultural status or familiarity with *carta stampata*, shared a common perception that they lacked *padronanza sulla produzione culturale*, that is, they lacked confidence in their mastery of cultural production. But it was exactly by interrogating this lack, they continue, that they found a way of relating with words and cultural production: listening to the words of other women and learning from their ability to put into words what also other women felt.

Saying, about the thing that you are trying to say «another woman has already said for me», changes the image of poverty and birth an image of a possible richness. [...] It is not spontaneous to make reference to one of our kind's [*una nostra simile*] words. Being able to do it constitutes what is perhaps the most important step in our politics. With this criterion we will reason upon books.³⁶

After only one year and five issues, one numbered Zero and the four following issues,³⁷ the group announced that they were going to suspend publication. The announcement was made via a public instance of self-reflexive discussion published in the last number, as per the collective's usual practice. The group spoke to its readers with a text entitled *Alle lettrici*, stating that *Via Dogana* intended to suspend operations "for at least six months". They felt it was urgently necessary for them to reflect on the *Via Dogana* experience because they were not able to properly carry out both activities, reflecting on what they were

³⁶ Editorial of the First *Via Dogana* paper (*Via Dogana Numero 0*, May 1983), ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 6.

³⁷ Information in press release dated 2nd June 1983, Milan, conserved in ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 5.

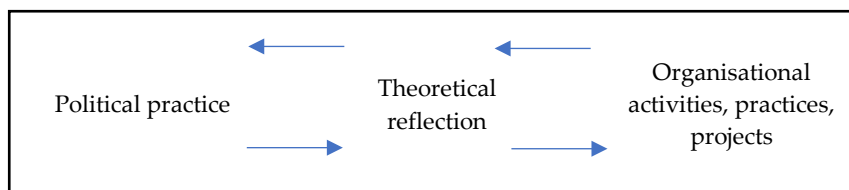
doing and dedicating themselves to the publication, at the same time. The group identified two main problems. On one hand, they questioned the editorial line of the periodical: their impression was that the decision to “speak about and through books” might have “complicated the elaboration and communication of political contents”. They thus invited readers to write to them and share their perceptions. On the other hand, there was an issue connected to the editorial work:

Regarding the other aspect, our job of thinking-writing-printing-distributing «Via Dogana», it is our task to say how is the situation. Up until now, that is to say before having reflected properly on this, the most evident thing is the following: we risk of maintaining on «Via Dogana» things that don't have a verification in practice among us. More than once, for example, we wrote about the practice of disparity in relationships among women, perhaps giving you the impression of a practice the we peacefully acquired. In reality in the group disparity exists and acts, but we can't say we practice it. [...] Then again we are convinced that in these fifteen months experience there are the premises for a real modification to happen. But we need to devote ourselves to it. [...] We ask you therefore to suspend the subscription, for now.

The political practice of the group, the theoretical reflection stemming from this practice and organisational practices were intertwined: their work was simultaneously *pensare-scrivere-stampare-distribuire*, and they were bound to speak and write about what they could genuinely sustain as a group practice. Theories and political proposals must come from knowledge gained through experience. For example, the journal was founded because the collective's internal analysis and reflection identified a sense of inadequacy in relation to male-dominated cultural production. This discovery produced a general theorisation, namely the assertion of the importance of recognising female genealogies. From this they outlined directions to take in order to pursue specific

activities, in this case a periodical presenting a review of women's books. However, the research on genealogies also influenced other bookshop's texts (1982 *Yellow Catalogue*) or practical activities (cf. note 19). Similarly, the group 'extracted' or deduced a theoretical proposition on the basis of reflecting on organisational practices that in turn ended up representing a political practice employed by the group. In this case, the collective realised that, although they were working as an editorial staff to promote certain ideas, as a group they were not actually living up to the concepts they theorised.³⁸ Therefore, they decided to shut down the publication in order to shed light on and delve into group processes and practices.³⁹

IMG. 13 - Two-way relationship between political practice, theoretical reflection and organising



Via Dogana re-opened in 1991 thanks to financial support from Rosetta Stella, a woman from the Roman section of the Italian Women's

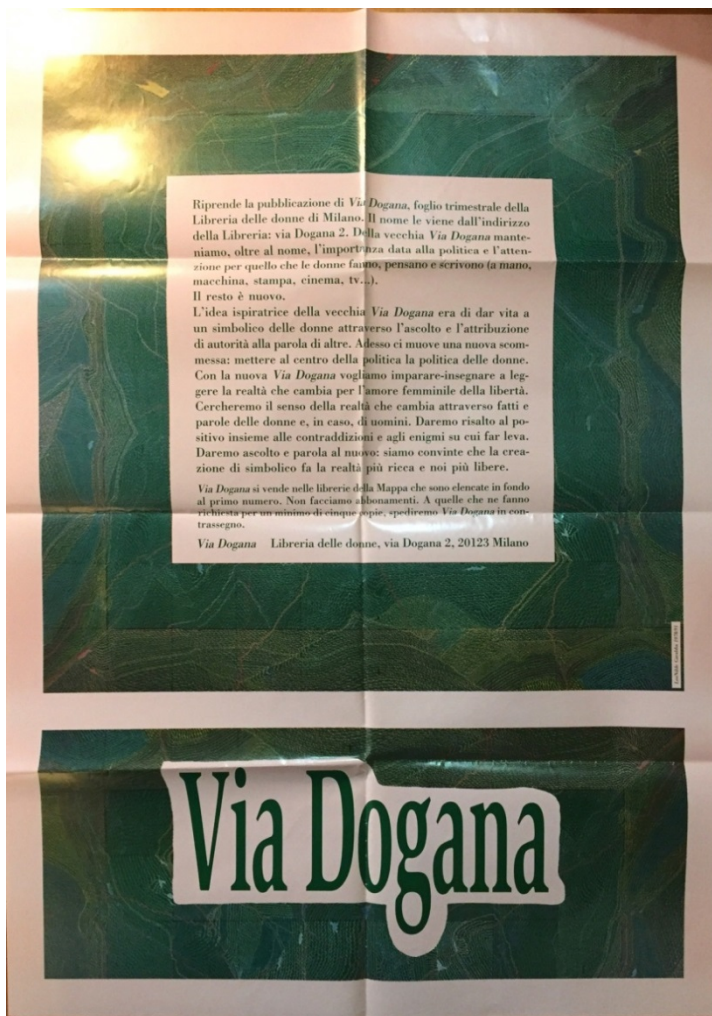
³⁸ The above excerpts, for example, refer to the notion of disparity among women that was then addressed in a later section. In this extract they outline their own inner group dynamics via text for their readers to understand, dynamics in which this idea of disparity is not accepted by everyone.

³⁹ A similar pattern was found in the processes of running the collective *Sottosopra* in the late Seventies, cf. chap. 5.

Union⁴⁰. The new *Via Dogana* was shaped by a more explicit take on *politica delle donne*, a more open communication style and the replacement of collective writing and anonymity with the explicit recognition of individual authors.

⁴⁰ Information stated in the leaflet *Invito alla stampa presentazione terzo numero di Via Dogana*, November 1991, in ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3. In the Luisa Muraro Archive, together with notes on the main themes developed in *Via Dogana* 1, there are also journal articles reporting information on the new opening of the *Via Dogana* magazine. An article in *Il Paese delle donne* by Marina Pivetta dated June 1991 addresses the issue of the relationship between the women who initiated the process of the new publication, Rosetta Stella from UDI and Luisa Muraro from *Libreria delle Donne*, concerning their different political affiliations, testifying to the peculiarity of this collaboration (Pivetta 1991 in ALM at FB, Milan, 4.3 B. 35, F. 1). Rosetta Stella's public writing (in the first issue of *Via Dogana*) explaining the motives behind the gesture of contributing financially to the publication of the new *Via Dogana* – the desire to support and spread women's thought and writing – was defined by a DWF article as a political gesture, citing the famous *Rivolta Femminile* book *È già politica* (Chiurlotto 1991 in ALM at FB, Milan, 4.3. B. 35, F. 1).

IMG. 14 - Manifesto for the publishing of the second «Via Dogana» paper, 1991
ALM at FB, Milan (4.2 B35 F1). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione
Badaracco, Milan.



The 1991 press release launching the new *Via Dogana* recites:

The old 'Via Dogana' was a small trimestral magazine speaking about women's politics through debates about books and other texts written by women. The new 'Via Dogana' conserved the attention for what women are doing, saying and writing (handwriting, typewriting, in the press, cinema, tv...), and the idea that the creation of symbolic is enriching reality and liberating us [*rende la realtà più ricca e noi più libere*]. The old 'Via Dogana' had this challenge: to engender a symbolic sphere for women through listening to and recognising female authority. Its launching text was entitled 'Some Woman Said That Before Me, for me'. This is now acquired, namely it is entering into women's common perception. [...] The new 'Via Dogana' has a new challenge: to stop the dualism according to which women's politics would be a politic, near another one, the male or the neutral one, by putting to the centre of politics women's politics. [...] We want to offer an adequate mirror for a changing reality, changing thanks to women's love for freedom.⁴¹

The first issue, entitled *La politica è la politica delle donne*, presented and discussed the project aim as: "to fight static separatism and put ourselves to the center of what we do and are (unions, party, journal, Church, science, family...) without espousing the distribution logic [*la logica della spartizione*] among women and men."⁴². The idea of

⁴¹ Press release on the first number of *Via Dogana* (1991), *Abbiamo mandato in tipografia il primo numero della nuova Via Dogana*, typewritten text, 2 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3. The underlined parts are in the original text.

⁴² Invitation for the press to the launch of the third issue of *Via Dogana* (November 1991), in ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3. The project and its standing was deemed to play an important role also by Tina Anselmi, President at the time of the Commissione Nazionale per la Realizzazione della Parità tra

“women’s politics” thus superseded both the radical feminist historical proposition of separatism and the logic of equality.

The archival documentation demonstrates that there was an effort to spread the word about the new publication. The press was invited to *ad hoc* meetings (in reality, the invites were sent to female journalists) aimed, on one hand, at presenting the new issue and, on the other, at creating the opportunity for encounters. These encounters had a two-fold significance: politically they can be understood as ways to debate important themes and generate ideas for the next issues; at the same time, evidently, they could also be considered a form of marketing. The text presented below, from the 1991 flyer presenting the third issue of *Via Dogana*, is an example of such a strategy: journalists were invited to comment on the magazine’s current and future issues as well as its language and degree of information on news and contemporary events.

Now that we have arrived at its third number, we want to present ‘Via Dogana’ to the press. [...] We invite you to discuss with us about the magazine: how it has been made up until now and how to do it in the future. One year ago we met at the Bookstore to debate on how to advertise adequately the changes in women’s society and culture. In that occasion many told us that a simpler language is needed in order to talk about women’s movement crucial themes. We try to do so with ‘Via Dogana’. We would like to listen to your professional competence as journalists on other issues: the attention to news report, because we would like to do a magazine not only on ideas but also facts, and many things of which women are leading characters are

Uomo e Donna, in a thank-you letter to Luisa Muraro (most probably the *Libreria* had sent her the first copy of the new *Via Dogana* edition) in which she states that she finds the project interesting and hopes that the *Libreria* work *si mantenga sempre a livelli di così alto impegno sociale*. The documentation on this is conserved at ALD at FB, Milan.

happening in the news; and to have a way of looking at events in a non-recriminatory way on what is wrong, even when wanting to change it, as it prefers to look for the new, to give account of it.⁴³

The new course of the magazine also entailed changes in the practical side of the endeavour. The new journal organisation involved a Director, journalist and writer Bibi Tomasi (cf. note 1 in chapter 6) and an editorial staff, the so-called *redazione ristretta*,⁴⁴ carrying out the editorial, communicational and printing activities. The work of the *redazione ristretta* was accompanied by that of the *redazione allargata*, open-invitation, public meetings to discuss the past journal issues and collectively discuss and gather opinions on contemporary questions or themes. An example of such activity is documented by a 1992 invitation to a public meeting,⁴⁵ a flyer stating:

The number 7 of Via Dogana, the Magazine on Politics by Libreria delle donne di Milano, is out. The first meeting, devoted to discuss the issue 6 of Via Dogana, held on the 21st October, has been lively and rich. [...] Therefore we propose to have a discussion for each new issue of Via Dogana. Therefore the newsroom INVITES to the discussion of Via Dogana number 7, entitled “Adam and Eve: The Unusual Couple”. The paradox of relationship between women and men, how the rules of the game

⁴³ Invitation for the press to the launch of the third issue of *Via Dogana* (November 1991), in ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3.

⁴⁴ I do not have information on the complete list of names of the staff, whose composition – that changed in the years – is not written in the pages of the magazine. From my interviews I retrieved stable members of it have been Bibi Tomasi, Luisa Muraro, Vita Cosentino, Clara Jourdan, Traudel Sattler.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Invito alla discussione pubblica del n. 7 di Via Dogana*, 2nd December 1992, in ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3.

have changed, (etc.). Among some of the latest themes that we propose for the debate is Television: a medium of communication that is important, today is even fundamental, yet women don't know or don't want to use it. What is the obstacle?

The discussion of this issue of the magazine thus also represented an occasion for generating new content for the following one.

The 'third chapter' of *Via Dogana's* life opened in 2015 with the passage to an online format.⁴⁶ The *Libreria* website reads:

The first issue of *Via Dogana* 47, the magazine by Libreria delle donne di Milano, which opened on 15th October 1975, was released in June 1991. Just to say we are not short lived [*non siamo effimere*]. Now we moved to the online. You, every one of you, women and men [*tutte e tutti*], really every women and men, are called upon to help us. Look out for us, let us now if we are doing okay or not, and suggest things to us. Every two months we meet up in flesh and bones to discuss about it.

The political orientation of the periodical is said to have been maintained along with its organisation. The *redazione ristretta* and *allargata* format is still in place, with the only difference being that, while the previous *Via Dogana* produced issues the content of which had been discussed in public meetings, *Via Dogana* 3 produces articles

⁴⁶ For an analysis of the overall process of online transition and an account of the birth of the *Libreria* website in 2001, cf. the next chapter.

⁴⁷ This statement, citing the 'second life' phase of *Via Dogana*, the one starting in 1991 and not the first one, of 1983, can be considered an indication on what the group considers the 'proper' *Via Dogana*, the one starting in 1991, while the appraisal of the very first one might be seen as an editorial experiment.

the publication of which follows public discussion.⁴⁸ The format, language and accessibility necessarily changed with the turn to an online format. Laura Milani, part of the *Via Dogana* editorial staff and one of the key supervisors of the online transfer, explains that the idea was to provide readers with a closer (in terms of time frame, with articles coming out according to a more flexible and faster schedule, better suited to the rapidity of the contemporary news cycle and fruition) and easier (via a project of language simplification)⁴⁹ interaction.

[...] Shorter timing, a more communicative language, more adherent to people that might write ten lines if they have an idea, as there no need to produce a formal publication. This not only to shorten [publishing] times but really to foster an immediacy in communication, so to have a quicker and simpler dialogue. And also because people are now used to send a post – writing an article is different. We wanted to measure ourselves with this issue, see if this simplicity could be a way to foster interactions.⁵⁰

7.2.1 Women's politics

Politica delle donne is an expression used by the *Libreria* and its member to express the possibility of a different way of articulating and understanding the political sphere stemming from the women's

⁴⁸ Information on the organisation of *Via Dogana* emerged during my interviews with Laura Milani (24th January 2018, Fondazione Elvira Badaracco, Milan) and Traudel Sattler (21st April 2018, Milan).

⁴⁹ The simplification should not be understood as a banalisation of the complexity of the topics or a move to reduce the depth of discussion, Laura specified, but rather a project of structuring a more open gatekeeping process in terms of article selection and editorial intervention.

⁵⁰ Interview with Laura Milani, 24th January 2018, Fondazione Elvira Badaracco, Milan.

movement, developed through experiential learning from practices and defined as part of waging political battles. The idea that political change is connected to individual change is the first, key tenet of this understanding of the sphere of the political, an idea which I addressed previously in treating the meaning of separatism and *autocoscienza* as political practices (chapp. 4 and 5). Given that grounding politics in one's personal experience is central to this conceptualisation, by criticising abstract and neutral concepts of citizenship before the law (understood as concealing male-specific 'universality'), this is a form of politics that "starts from an acknowledgement of the originary nonuniversality of sexuated subjectivity and experience" (Murphy 2008: XXV). In practice (for example, looking at the positions the *Libreria* expressed in public debates on, for example, abortion legislation in 1975-76 (cf. chapter 4) and the 1979 proposed legislation on violence against women)⁵¹, the *politica delle donne* position entails

⁵¹ The key tenets of the law proposal were three: that violence against women should be considered as a crime against the human being (*la persona*) and should be automatically prosecuted, notwithstanding the approval of the victim and that women's associations devoted to violence reduction could bring a civic action in the trials. The *Libreria* was against this proposition, deeming it a coercive way to get rid of women's issues through the institutional power, and seeing the automatic prosecution as unacceptable, as it was conceived as a way of skipping the autonomy of judgement and desires or needs of the victim. One year after the publication the *Green Catalogue*, in 1979, *Libreria* promoted a conference (Società Umanitaria, Milan, 27th-28th October 1979) to discuss the 1979 law proposal on violence against women, drafted by UDI and MLD. The conference proceedings can be found at Fondazione Badaracco: *Atti del convegno Umanitaria e volantino su testo di legge* in ALD at FB, Milan, (1.1. B. 1, F. 7). The position of the *Libreria*, shared by other Milanese feminists, is elaborated in a 1979 leaflet and in an article appeared in the national communist newspaper *Il Manifesto* (12th December 1979). The title of the journal article was *Cambiare la proposta di legge sulla violenza sessuale? Sì, con una nuova pratica politica fondata sulla soggettività delle donne*, signed by Luisa Abbà, Piera Bosotti, Bibi Tomasi, Lia Cigarini, Maria Gregorio, Lea Melandri,

understanding the primacy of women's experience and the need to empower women to autonomously speak for and represent themselves, in relation to one another, moving beyond the power of laws. It thus follows that concrete experiences are the bases for political formulations⁵² and that educational and cultural actions and projects are considered to be as – if not more – important than juridical proposals. The cultural sphere is important in this respect as it also encompasses the ability for women to articulate discourse independently as opposed to having men talk about them as an object of discourse. The primacy of women's experience in its multifaceted diversity is also expressed in the refusal of the very possibility of a sex-based political representation. The main argument here is not only that women are not a homogeneous group which might be represented as such, but also that entering into local or state-level institutions entails a

Luisa Muraro and Franca Spirito. The article can be retrieved in ALM at FB (3.1. B. 21, F.2). This moment has been read retrospectively by *Libreria* women themselves, as expressed in the pages of the collective volume *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987: 80), as the first time that the bookstore 'spoke' as a collective entity, taking a public positioning on a political issue. The Milan's bookshop positions were shared among other women, for example coming from another Italian women's bookstore, the women of the Turin Women's Bookstore collective (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987: 81)

⁵² For example, this is the political practice of the *Libreria delle Donne* job market group that works on projects regarding the economy or labour market starting from collective proposals. Here there is another expression used to signify the centrality of experience in formulating practical proposals to improve living conditions (for example in the sphere of work), namely *politica prima* or *primum vivere*. Cf. Cigarini and Cavaliere 2013. *Politica prima* is also used to underline that the political sphere does not end with institutional politics and, rather, actions carried out every day by civic society engaged in working for a better humanity also constitute politics (cf. *Sottosopra Rosso* 1996 and the analysis of it by Martucci 2008: 45).

specific challenge in that it poses the risk of having women's politics be co-opted by the patriarchal symbolic order.

Eyes get used quickly to seeing a woman in a man's role when she is carrying out functions established by patriarchal social order. There is no signification of sexual difference without transgression, without subversion of the reality. It cannot be molded on the received symbolic order... of course, provided that the point is fight for women's freedom and not just for women's equality with men.⁵³

In this sense, women's neglected role in society was understood not as a gap that must be overcome to reach men's positions and achievements, but rather as an opportunity that should be leveraged on to imagine and work for a different society, one not defined by power and its games, as Luisa Muraro wrote:

the feminist movement revealed that the aversion for politics understood as competition and struggle for power, an widespread aversion among women, is not a refusal of politics, but on the contrary a demand for politics: there is a demand that where the machine of power now stands, political life should come to be. (Muraro 2009: 85)

7.3 The publication of a troublesome text: the *Green Sottosopra*

⁵³ Lia Cigarini, *La separazione femminile*, in *Sottosopra Blu. Sulla rappresentanza politica femminile, sull'arte di polemizzare tra donne e sulla rivoluzione scientifica in corso*, 1987.

[<http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/oldsite/news/articoli/sottosopra87.htm> – last accessed 22-01-2019].

In 1975, when the *Libreria* opened its doors, *Sottosopra* was still a collective publication, a platform for the feminist movement as a whole, and had published five issues (cf. chapter 5, section 5.3 which addresses *Sottosopra* journals during their phase as a collective publication). Seven years after the last collective publication of *Sottosopra*, in 1983, the text *Più donne che uomini* was published. This also came to be known as *Sottosopra Verde*, the *Green Sottosopra*. From this moment onwards, this irregular publication was linked to the thought of *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano (cf. Paolozzi and Leiss 1999: 190) which ‘speaks’ and positions itself through the propositions developed in the various discussion groups within the *Libreria* and presented in the issues of *Sottosopra*. Table 6 presents the year, title and theme of the publications that different groups in the women’s movement produced from its inception to 1983; beginning in 1983 it became a journal explicitly developed by the *Libreria* as an autonomous subject.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For an analysis of the content and theoretical contribution of *Sottosopra*, cf. Paolozzi and Leiss 1999 and Fanciullacci 2016.

TAB. 6 - *Sottosopra* Journal: title, year, theme

Title and Year	Theme
Sottosopra (1973). Esperienze dei gruppi femministi in Italia ("Sottosopra. Experiences of the Feminist Groups in Italy")	Review of experiences and practices in the women's movement.
Sottosopra (1974). Esperienze dei gruppi femministi in Italia ("Sottosopra. Experiences of the Feminist Groups in Italy")	Review of experiences and practices in the women's movement.
Sottosopra (1975). Sessualità, procreazione, maternità, aborto. Documenti di gruppi femministi. Testimonianze di donne. Interventi dell'incontro del 1 e 2 febbraio al Circolo De Amicis di Milano. Fascicolo Speciale ("Sottosopra. Sexuality, Procreation, Maternity, Abortion")	Sexuality, maternity, abortion.
Sottosopra (1976a). Sottosopra Senape ("Mustard Yellow Sottosopra")	Organising and self-reflexive consideration of the practices of making the journal. It contains the text <i>Time, Means, Places</i> that defines the 'practice of doing'.
Sottosopra (1976b). Sottosopra Rosa, fascicolo speciale. Alcuni documenti di pratica politica ("Pink Sottosopra. Some Documents on Political Practice")	Reflections on political practices (such as <i>autocoscienza</i> and the practice of the "unconscious") and on the meaning of being a collective.
Sottosopra (1983). Sottosopra Verde. Più donne che uomini ("Green Sottosopra. More Women than Men")	Proposal of the practice of <i>affidamento</i> ("entrustment") among women.

<p>Sottosopra (1987). Sottosopra Blu, fascicolo speciale. Sulla rappresentanza politica femminile, sull'arte di polemizzare tra donne e sulla rivoluzione scientifica in corso ("Blu Sottosopra. On Sex-Based Political Representation, on Debating among Women Seen as an Art, and on the Current Scientific Revolution")</p>	<p>Issue devoted to reflecting on the conditions of possibility through which women might have political representatives in local or national-level institutions. Reflections on the meaning of conflict among women and presentation of the activities of <i>Hypatia</i>, <i>Libreria's</i> research group on science issues.</p>
<p>Sottosopra (1989). Sottosopra Oro. Un filo di felicità ("Golden Sottosopra. A Thread of Joy")</p>	<p>What liberty means for women, reflection on work as both material and intellectual, proposals for non-gender neutral juridical theory.</p>
<p>Sottosopra (1996). Sottosopra Rosso. È accaduto non per caso ("Red Sottosopra. It Happened, and Not by Chance")</p>	<p>The text provocatively sees the disruption of the social fabric and other contemporary issues as signs that the patriarchy has ended. It reflects on the challenges involved in women assuming a role in shaping the symbolic order.</p>
<p>Sottosopra (2009). Immagina che il lavoro ("Imagine Work")</p>	<p>Manifesto on job market related issues such as the relationship between motherhood, caring work and careers.</p>
<p>Sottosopra (2018). Cambio di civiltà. Punti di vista e di domanda ("A Civilisation Shift. Points of View and Questions Marks")</p>	<p>This recent Sottosopra tackles contemporary political issues such as the impact of the MeToo movement and the status of prostitution via a reflection on Rachel Moran's book <i>Paid For. My Journey through Prostitution</i> and an essay on surrogacy by Luisa Muraro.</p>

From 1983 onwards, the published texts contributed to defining Feminism of Difference and had reverberations at the national level while also influencing the feminist movement.⁵⁵ At this point I briefly present the proposals regarding and analytical development of the political practices of *disparità* and *affidamento* among women as outlined in the *Green Sottosopra*, as these have been very influential: this position has been defined as a “shockwave” (Bracke 2014a: 193), a “*spartiacque teorico-politico*” (Paolozzi and Leiss 1999: 65) and a “definitive turning point” (De Lauretis 1990: 8), considered as the “beginning of the new course of the theoretical Italian feminism” (Restaino 2002b: 72) in Italy; the text had also some international resonance.⁵⁶

The document begins by reflecting on the perception that women have failed to make achievements in the social sphere and asserts that the theme of discrimination is a way of covering up women’s responsibilities (its tone is not prescriptive; rather, the reflection, as usual, starts off as an inquiry into something that has appeared in group discussions). The writers recognise that this underachievement is coupled to a sense of “estrangement”, which they characterise as a mute refusal in relation to society as it is and a desire

⁵⁵ In the interview with architect Stefania Giannotti this perception of *Libreria* as a speaking (and authoritative) entity emerged often. She told me how even during that time when she knew *Libreria* only as a woman interested in feminism (that is to say, before her direct involvement with the place), she was precisely aware of the importance for the movement of *Libreria*’s texts. She told me how among feminist they were saying things like: “A new *Sottosopra* is out! [...] “They wrote that... [...] Then we should do this...” (interview with Stefania Giannotti, 16th March 2018, Milan).

⁵⁶ For example, it was translated in German and widely debated in the same year of publication (interview with Traudel Sattler, 21st April 2018, Milan).

to excel, to master social life, that they call “the wish to win”.⁵⁷ This impasse is to be resolved, they write, by employing a structure of relationships among women, a structure which is symbolical, in that it is nourished by public verbal references and referrals, and material, in that it is enacted contextually in the social sphere. The structure does not entail a sort of alliance among women, but it does hinge on recognising differences among women in an act that the authors themselves frame as different from a previous “egalitarianism inherited from the youth movement” in that “the regime of sameness between women is based on an undervaluation of womanhood”.⁵⁸ The assumption underlying this statement is that, under patriarchy, women are treated the same regardless of their differences and statuses, a treatment that is reproduced, according to the authors, in women’s groups (what in the Anglo-Saxon context was expressed by the term *sisterhood*): “out of fear that authority and distinction are synonymous with the patriarchal power that is being resisted” (Martinis Roe 2018: 59). Rather, they assert, by recognising differences we are also able to see women as possessing the proper, full status of subject, and to foster the creation of social ties among women, especially between two women in which one acknowledges that the other is more competent (not as an absolute quality; rather, a concept of competence that should be assessed contextually).

The recognition of disparities among women is [...] not an end in itself. It is the practice of a contradiction, a practice which is needed to allow freedom from the fear of being less than other women and through which each woman can arrive at a sense of her own value because she can rely on what is valuable in others,

⁵⁷ English version of the text available at <http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/pubblicazioni/more-women-than-men-sottosopra-january-1983/> (last accessed 22-01-2019).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

and treat it as an element of strength. That this recognition of value and mutual trust takes place among women who spend time with each other and work together creates a strong precedent. It means we have a point to refer to where the integrity of womanhood is confirmed and the “something extra” which is being looked for can be found.⁵⁹

The proposal consists in the new practice of *affidamento* (“entrustment”). As philosopher Teresa De Lauretis defines it, *affidamento*, entailing the recognition of differences (practice of *disparità*, “disparity practice”) is:

a term proposed to designate a relationship between two women which, though recorded and variously accounted for in feminist and women’s writing, had not yet been named or formally addressed in feminist theory. Briefly, the relationship of entrustment is one in which one woman gives her trust or entrusts herself symbolically to another woman, who thus becomes her guide, mentor, or point of reference – in short, the figure of symbolic mediation between her and the world. Both women engage in the relationship – and here is the novelty, and the most controversial aspect of this feminist theory of practice – not in spite but rather because and in full recognition of the disparity that may exist between them in class or social position, age, level of education, professional status, income etc. That is to say, the function of female symbolic mediation that one woman performs for the other is achieved, not in spite but rather because of the power differential between them, contrary to the egalitarian feminist belief that women’s mutual trust is incompatible with unequal power. (De Lauretis 1990: 8-9)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

This practice has implications for organising, as researcher and artist Alex Martinis Roe (2018) has noted. This practice functions as a way of overcoming the shortcomings of horizontal collective organisation common to earlier feminist groups. “Denying that hierarchies exist in collectives can easily generate power dynamics that reproduce the violence of the kind of relationships that exist in institutions where hierarchy is explicit” (Martinis Roe 2018: 58). Moreover, *affidamento* as a basic relational unit comprising a pair of women is a flexible form of organising which, based as it is on recognising other women’s value, competence or desire, and being structured according to this acknowledgement rather than a shared identity, can be adapted to respond to different situations.

The text was influential in giving rise to projects such as the research community *Diotima* (cf. next section, 7.3.1) and was a magnet for many women not previously involved with *Libreria* activities – such as teacher and theorist Vita Cosentino, who recalls how her encounter with the thinking expressed in *Sottosopra Verde*, analysed at a seminar held at Bocconi University, was the trigger that drove her to go and meet the women of the *Libreria*.⁶⁰ It also generated severe ruptures within the movement, however, as different factions agreed with or rejected the theoretical proposition contained in the text.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Cosentino et al. 2016:25 - 26

⁶¹ The 1983 publication of *Sottosopra Verde*, for example, was the driving force behind a division within the Virginia Woolf Cultural Centre in Rome that caused it to split into two groups, one that identified with the new politics laid out in *Sottosopra Verde* (the Group B) and another one that did not. Other *Sottosopra* had a similar impact; for example, the 1995 issue, *È accaduto non per caso*, announcing the “end of the patriarchy”, was met with both enthusiastic agreement and severe critiques.

7.3.1 Relationship with other organisations: the philosophical community of *Diotima*

The publication also played a role in producing the woman's philosophical community of *Diotima*⁶² in Verona, as philosopher Chiara Zamboni recalls:

In 1983, Luisa Muraro asked for a group discussion on a political pamphlet that had just come out by the Women's Bookshop in Milan, entitled "More Women Than Men". We met in the home of Annamaria Piussi, who then lived in Via della Fontana del Ferro in Verona, to talk about it. The group continued to meet regularly for at least a year and took its name from the street where Annamaria lived. Then we realised something that ended up changing the group's direction. Almost all of us involved in the discussions came from a philosophy background and so philosophy kept coming up in the concepts we employed, the way we structured our arguments and our references. This repetition was too persistent for us to ignore, and so our attention, which until then had been focused only on issues surrounding women's politics, began to shift. The women who took part in the discussions loved philosophy and at the same time felt keenly the lack of importance that being a woman entails in philosophical discourse, in its codes and the concepts passed down through the centuries by the male tradition. The invention of *Diotima*, which gave us a new beginning, arose from the desire to unite our love for philosophy with loyalty to our

⁶² Diotima of Mantinea is mentioned in Plato's *Symposium* as the priestess who teaches Socrates the formulation of love as "philosophy" (Restaino 2002: 73). In his introduction to the English edition of *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* by Luisa Muraro, Timothy S. Murphy argues that Diotima might be seen as an exemplary figure of Muraro metaphysics and political project in that she "constitutes a female progenitor formally acknowledged by patriarchal theosophy, but her contributions to thought are expropriated and suppressed by that very acknowledgment" (Murphy 2018: XXVI).

womanhood, which needed to find a way of being expressed through discourse itself.⁶³ (Zamboni 2015)

Diotima is a philosophical community of women founded by philosophers Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Chiara Zamboni and composed of an initial group of women together with many others who have participated over the years in *fare Diotima*. *Fare Diotima*, “enacting Diotima”, is an expression the community uses to refer to a practice-based, relational process of thinking. One of the first elements of the community thinking process is to avoid codified references to external authorities (i.e. other thinkers in the philosophical tradition) (cf. Muraro and Zamboni 1987: 179) in order to instead derive and develop theoretical thought starting from the actual discussions held by the community. Indeed, the community treats the practice of thinking as an act of *pensare in presenza* (Zamboni 2009), in continuity with the feminist inclination for knowledge-generation carried out by listening to one’s own experience, measured by and in relation to others.

The practices introduced into our philosophical community were equally important. For example, the fact that we reasoned and debated orally, in the presence of others, believed in the worth of what each speaker was saying, and excluded the philosophers (both male and female) that we had read and that formed our educational backgrounds. This emphasised the importance that oral philosophy came to have alongside its written counterpart. The model for our oral philosophy came from feminist practices, which were mostly oral. All this has created a fabric of female thought over the years, with its own way of progressing and its own style. Our female philosophy developed through practising it, intertwining with the topics we broached as we went along,

⁶³ For a complete account of the events leading up to the constitution of *Diotima*, cf. also Muraro and Zamboni 1987.

but without being tied down by the topics. In other words, we have gradually created a form of philosophical process that goes hand in hand with the content of the idea. Moreover, we have been very careful to develop both aspects, because both are highly symbolic. (Zamboni 2015)

Diotima reflections take the form of an annual seminar and publication. The research issues on which the group has been working during the year are presented for public debate at the yearly, open *Grande Seminario di Diotima* at the University of Verona. The discussions generated through the seminar are usually the basis for the yearly publications.⁶⁴ It is evident that this process bears similarities to those of the *Libreria* analysed earlier: the inner group reflects on a topic that it finds interesting or problematic, it sets up a public meeting to discuss it and, after these occasions of relating and mutual exchange, participants produce theoretical formulations, themes or issues; these are then reformulated by the research group before taking the form of a publication presenting the results of the process.

This unique research community is composed of women who are in love with philosophical debate, whether their backgrounds lie in the

⁶⁴ For the complete list of *Diotima* publications, see bibliography (Diotima 1987-2017). *Diotima* is also publisher of a journal, *Per amore del mondo*. The title is 'stolen' from Hannah Arendt: "[...] who would have liked to use it for *Vita Activa*, to show that philosophy wasn't a higher contemplative life, dead to the world. The love for philosophy practised by *Diotima* is love for the world. Our practice of philosophy has been, and is at present, a philosophical practice and at the same time a practice of the world, both moved by a desire which is ours and of the reality of the world. It is the love that makes the world spin, and that we hope will make our heads spin. It is love for the world that urges one to look for the sense of what we perceive all around us as well as of what remains invisible, a stranger to a superficial sight. It makes us stay close, in our words, to contingency and its grasping sense, which otherwise is subordinated to given interpretations" (Sartori 2016).

academy, public education or other careers (“we decided that, even though we had the University as principal location, we must remain open to philosophy lovers, notwithstanding their profession”) (Muraro and Zamboni 1987: 177). The community put down roots at the University of Verona (where various members were professors of Philosophy) and moved the group’s meeting place from a private home to the spaces of the University. There is clearly a connection between this initiative and the history of *pratica del fare*.

This was a symbolic gesture for us. We wanted to show that using a private house continued the old separatism, which had marked (and in many ways had good reason to) the feminism of the 1970s, but which by the 80s had basically ended. With *Diotima*, did we want to signal the inclusion of women in institutions? Absolutely not. Rather, we wanted to create the contradiction of a thinking and autonomous female presence within the institutions and see what would happen in terms of changes to the institution itself.⁶⁵

Diotima thus also shares another trait with the *Libreria*, that is, a rejection of imposed institutionalisation and the creation of autonomous space which, in keeping with the idea of *politica delle donne*, has the challenging task of seeking to modify and interact with traditional spaces. The fact that the philosophers meet and talk to one another seated in a circle (Muraro and Zamboni 1987: 178) is another indication of *Diotima*’s genealogical relationship with the feminist approach to female aggregation and self-expression.

As a consequence of this approach the project does not have a “classic organisational structure”, explains Annarosa Buttarelli: the

⁶⁵ Zamboni 2015.

community is not ratified formally as such⁶⁶ and new members join through a process that does not entail any formal proof of philosophical training or similar requirements. The community meets monthly, then organises two yearly retreats (one at the beginning of the year and one at the beginning of the summer) aimed at generating the themes and questions to be discussed at the Great Seminar (held in autumn). The first meeting is open to Diotimas while the second one is open by invitation; the great seminar is a public event. “There you go, this is the organisation at its minimum, and also its maximum. So there is not much to say about organising (*sull’organizzazione*)”.⁶⁷ This is the personal account of one member, but it is possible to infer from the interview that women take on roles in running meetings and dealing with other issues which are not imposed but rather spring from a willingness to serve as the person-in-charge for the community and a recognition of responsibility by the community itself. This issue of the relationship between roles and responsibilities will be analysed in depth in the section in which I analyse the organisational life of the *Libreria*.

7.4 A seminal book: “Don’t think you have any rights”⁶⁸

While *Sottosopra Verde* was a proposal for interpreting the present and future of the women’s movement beyond some of its traditional tenets

⁶⁶ This narrative is somewhat unclear, as the story by Muraro and Zamboni (1987) suggests that the research group asked for research funds from the University, thus institutionalising it in some way.

⁶⁷ Interview with Annarosa Buttarelli, 30th March 2018, Milan.

⁶⁸ This translation is not the one used by the English text currently available (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 1990), translated by Teresa De Lauretis and Patricia Cicogna, but it is used by artist Alex Martinis Roe in her book (2018) and by the forthcoming English edition of the text by Silver Press.

(for example separatism, as the proposal rather highlighted women's "desire to win" and sisterhood, as it brought the issue of differences among women to the fore), the book *Non credere di avere dei diritti. La generazione della libertà femminile nell'idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne* can be seen as "collective autobiography" (Di Cori 1987),⁶⁹ as an attempt to look up at history and take over its narration. In this sense, the book represents both a bibliographical source and a historical document. Indeed, it consists of a historical reconstruction of Italian feminism as told from the 'partial' point of view of a group of some of the women implicated in that history. In Teresa De Lauretis' words:

[the book] is not only a major theoretical text of Italian feminism but one which, in elaborating a critical theory of culture based on the practice of sexual difference, also reconstructs a history of feminism in Italy from the particular location, the social and political situatedness, of its authors. (De Lauretis 1990: 1)

The collective effort by *Libreria delle Donne* thus entailed writing about their experience as a group while at the same time offering a reading of the key developments in the theories and practices of the Italian

⁶⁹ In the article, the historian defines the books as "one of the most important contribution to the history of Italian feminism of the year", and stresses that its relevance lies not only in the content of the political proposals explained (i.e. *affidamento*) but also in the use of "dry, anti-sentimental and precise" language, distant in style both from romanticised political narrations and academic publications. "It is rare", the scholar concludes the article, "to encounter such a free and radically challenging use of the critical capacity in interpreting literary texts, philosophical theories, centuries old mental schemes". The article is conserved, together with other material concerning the publishing of *Non credere* (articles, book reviews, texts, letters, interviews) testifying the scope of the impact it had on Italian feminism and culture, at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 6.

feminist movement. Just like the above-mentioned *Sottosopra Verde*, the *Non credere* has been influential in drawing women to the *Libreria*. This happened for example to Clara Jourdan, as she recalls in her interview.

I arrived in *Libreria* in 1987, after having read *Non credere di avere dei diritti*. I was part of the feminist movement even before, both in university and when I moved to Milan [...]. In reading *Non credere di avere dei diritti* I recognised a greatness of feminism, of which I was a part of, of which I was not conscious about. It gave me a rich reading of the events; so I wanted to be part of it. I wrote a letter, Luisa Muraro answered inviting me to go the Bookstore. I started working at this group that was called *Ipazia*, on science issues, and I edited a publication *Quattro giovedì e un venerdì per la filosofia* and from there I participated to all the other activities.⁷⁰

Traudel Sattler, *Libreria* member, also noted the power of this text in the process of translating it into German. Traudel was participating in the preparatory meetings and, while the book was taking form, she said to herself:

"They have to read this in Germany, this is very important, I absolutely have to translate it. So I searched for a publishing house and I started translating it. I still remember the first pages,

⁷⁰ Interview with Clara Jourdan, 12th January 2018, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan. A document (a letter from Clara to *Libreria delle Donne*, dated 15th August 1987) confirm this narration (cf. ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 6). Clara Jourdan is a long-time member of the *Libreria*. At the time she was already involved in the women's movement, as is testified by her book on the experience of feminist counselling centres (1976). The 1976 book stemmed from Jourdan's own degree dissertation, under prof. Laura Balbo, in the Methodology of Sociological Research. On the connection between university research and the birth of early feminist texts, cf. chapter 4, note 14.

when I saw those phrases black on white, in my own mother tongue... they had an even greater impact [...].

M- You mean that in translating them, they reverberated...

T - Yes, much louder! I felt it [the book content] as a very powerful thing even before, but when I saw it in my language this was amplified. It was a fight with my own language, because they were unthought ideas in that language. I had to really make an effort to express them. But it was a process that I enjoyed, that also put me back in contact with myself, my mother tongue. I said to myself 'now I have to be able to express this in German'!

... *Affidamento* remained *affidamento* [laugh]! ⁷¹

The text was translated in other languages as well⁷²: in 2017 it was translated into French⁷³ and an English edition is forthcoming from London's feminist publishing house Silver Press.

⁷¹ According to Traudel, references to some contemporary groups working on translating and disseminating *Libreria* in the work of German journalist Antje Schrupp (for example, her blog (<http://www.antjeschrupp.de/>) has helped spread Italian feminism of difference in German-speaking countries. Together with Dorothee Markert she also translated three *Diotima* books (Diotima 2012b, 1999b, 1999c). Moreover, there are more recent instances of engagement between German and Swiss groups and the *Libreria*. Two feminist groups from Zurigo and Berlin, after reading *Non credere* and having a conversation with the *Libreria*, spent some time visiting the bookstore to observe its practice and activities.

⁷² For the complete list of translations, see bibliography (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1987-2017 and Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990). The Spanish edition has been the starting point of the relation and dialogue between Duoda Centre de Recerca de Dones (the Women's Research Centre of Barcelona) and Milan's *Libreria*.

⁷³ The French translation of 2017 came about because a group of young students and radical activists 'stumbled upon' the book while pursuing their political

7.4.1 If putting practice into words is theorising, then this is a book of theory

Interpreting journalist and independent scholar Ida Dominijanni's book review of *Non credere*, the significance of the political proposition laid out in the text and the reason why the book was written are interwoven elements, each of which depends on the other.

The sense of the political proposal: what a woman suffers from is being put into the world without a symbolic placement, deprived precisely of that social dress that is language and of all the successive mediations that can 'signify' her in the world; that is speak her sexual difference and give it a social existence. It is this suffering which calls for a revolution, and so the revolution of feminism will be of a symbolic order. The *raison d'être* of this book is to give a name to that which didn't have a name; to put into words a political practice, so turning it into theory; to reconstruct and circulate its language, thus giving it a 'social dress'. So that it might finally be sayable, signifiable to others, transmittable. (Dominijanni 1987)⁷⁴

research on social movements. The reading of the text inspired them, especially the idea of being able to articulate an autonomous resistance to power. "Questo libro ci trasmetteva forza nei confronti delle nostre esperienze e circa le questioni che attraversano i diversi collettivi. Il progetto si rivolge a tutte e tutti coloro che, come noi, lottano in una prospettiva d'autonomia rispetto ai poteri (istituzioni, ambito medico, giustizia e altri campi), ma forse anche a chiunque sappia trovare qui delle parole sulle esperienze personali, troppo spesso condannate al silenzio o al margine" (Maffioli 2017). The translation of the text then led to a closer relationship with the *Libreria*. After the translation, the group invited the *Libreria* to a series of seminars, talks and debates to accompany the book publication and to further develop the narration of *Libreria* life (Minguzzi 2017).

⁷⁴ The excerpt is from the English version, translated by S. Wood, published in Bono, P. and Kemp, S. (eds.) (1991): 129.

According to Dominijanni, this point constitutes one of the book's strengths:

It seems to me that this is precisely where the first merit of the book lies, in managing to communicate a political experience which in its turn – just like the existential experience of the subjects who constructed it – could have stayed within the realm of things lived but not signifiable to others – to other women – not translatable into the explicit and settled heritage of memory. And in managing to do this while giving that political experience an interpretation. (Dominijanni 1987)⁷⁵

Interpretation would seem to be an apt word choice since the book presents a subjective and partial history of Italian feminism since the Seventies, as the collective itself writes in the first pages of the book. The critiques generated by the text, as reported by Dominijanni, had to do with this admittedly partial point of view in the narration of history. Nevertheless, it is thanks to this very element that the book is able to tell a story that weaves together the narration of a historical event and the personal transformations it entailed, and to theorise on the basis of those historical and existential events and experiences. Ida Dominijanni talks about the book and its language being successful in offering an “experience restitution” (*restituzione d'esperienza*).⁷⁶ The incipit of the book talks about this link between narration and theorising.

If putting a political practice into words is the same thing as theorising, then this a book of theory, because the relations between women are the subject matter of our politics and of this

⁷⁵ Cf. *supra*. Pp. 129-130

⁷⁶ Dominijanni underlines that part of this masterful job is thanks to the writing of Luisa Muraro, who undertook the writing part of the collective endeavour.

book. It is a book of theory, then, but interspersed with stories. We believe that to write theory is partly to tell about practice, since theoretical reasoning generally refers to things which already have names. Here we are dealing partly with things that had no names. (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 26)

This opening statement represents a declaration about the nature of the book, but it is also significant in that it clarifies what theorising means for the collective. *If* we consider theorising to be process of nomination of concrete practices, *then* this a book of theory. The use of the hypothetical sentence sheds light on an important point. The group challenges the idea of theory as an abstract, self-sufficient and internally coherent whole, defining it instead as the formalisation of practices. More specifically, theory is conceptualised as telling about practices under a specific condition: when the narration in question (the political history of the Milan bookstore collective) is dealing with a process of naming ideas, events and experiences that were new (i.e. new women's politics and experiences), that required as part of their making a joint effort of doing-saying.

This is an important point for the *Libreria's* conception of political and theoretical work that not only clearly exemplifies the meaning of the relationship between theory and practice but also expresses the centrality of the linguistic sphere as a context offering the possibility of expression, and therefore of transmitting new ideas. In other words, feminist practices are understood as relational endeavours wherein the symbolic dimension holds a central place.

7.5 Feminism of difference and (some) strictly philosophical aspects

As Historian Franco Restaino (2002b) has argued, a "theoretical elaboration in its strictly philosophical aspects (*aspetti propriamente*

filosofici) and a proper international presence of Italian feminist theory” (Restaino, 2002: 70) came to be formalised in the Eighties⁷⁷ in connection with the work of *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano and *Diotima*, founded in that decade. The community gave rise to figures such as philosophers Adriana Cavarero (born 1947) – who later distanced herself from it in 1990 – and Luisa Muraro (Restaino 2002b). Muraro (born 1940), as already noted, is part of the founding group of the bookstore and was the most “productive and outspoken” member of this group (Murphy 2018: XXIV).⁷⁸ As previously noted, the central feature of the “theoretical horizon that goes under the name of sexual difference thought” (Cavarero 2002b: 98) is the act of grounding theory in practice. In fact, Teresa De Lauretis, in introducing Feminism of Difference as an idea developed by the *Libreria*, refers to it as “a theory of a social-symbolic practice” rather than a philosophy. In this framework,

the concepts that articulate this theory of sexual difference (genealogy, symbolic mother, female freedom, female subject – terms drawn from Western critical discourse but otherwise inflected and drastically recast) are in relationship with “the

⁷⁷ Carla Lonzi has been a key thinker; she was already active in the very early years of the movement and her writings went on to become “seminal texts” (Restaino 2002b: 70) for the mature feminist philosophical debates of the Eighties. In fact, Lonzi is regarded retrospectively as the founding figure of Feminism of Difference in Italy (Muraro 1991; Restaino 2002a; cf. chapter 4 for an overview of Lonzi’s conception of *difference*). Besides Lonzi, key references in the theoretical elaborations on sexual difference by Italian philosophers can be found in the *milieu* of French feminism, with influence stemming from groups such as *Psychanalyse et Politique* by Antoinette Fouque, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous and especially Luce Irigaray.

⁷⁸ This connotation is quite likely related to an assessment of Muraro’s textual production, which is indeed very vast [cf. <http://www.diotimafilosofe.it/autore/luisa-muraro/> – last accessed 17-02-2019].

original feminist practices which ground the theory and to which the theory gives formal expression (*autocoscienza*, entrustment, disparity, female relations). (De Lauretis 1990:10)

On one hand, this expression *theory of a socio-symbolic practice* highlights not only the way this thinking drew on the political practices of the women's movement, but also its conception of philosophical work. Philosopher Adriana Cavarero further clarifies this point, explaining that:

Italian philosophers of sexual difference move in fact mostly within the political practices and speculate on them rather than on canonical texts of philosophy. Of course, the work on texts is done, as it is part of the craft, but they are approached with a gaze that is oriented towards issues coming from real context where the various practices are weaved. (Cavarero 2002b: 97)⁷⁹

Another key element of Feminism of Difference is the conception of the political nature of a symbolic order (*politica del simbolico*) centred on the mother figure; the "symbolic mother", a concept that appears in the various practices but was first theoretically developed in Luisa Muraro

⁷⁹ Cavarero further explains that practices are also central in that they are a dimension in which psychoanalysis has clearly had an impact on Italian feminist theory, with productive results. For example, the idea of disparity among women (necessary for the conceptualisation of the "entrustment" practice, cf. section 7.3) is typical of the psychoanalytical relationship, while the centrality of the relational net in feminist practices implies the dismantling of the rational and completely self-conscious notion of subject operated by Freud (Cavarero 2002b). The influence of psychoanalysis in Italian feminism can also be seen in the political reading of psychoanalytic theories by the French group *Psychanalyse et Politique*. On the relationship between "Psy et Po" and Milan Bookstore cf. *supra* note 8.

work (Cavarero 2002b:99). Indeed, the idea of “symbolic order of the mother” is laid out in the 1991 work by Luisa Muraro (*L’ordine simbolico della madre*).⁸⁰

In this text, Luisa Muraro formulates an alternative to the patriarchal system by proposing another symbolic order (“a language, a theory, a life practice”, Restaino 2002b: 73), not the one ruled by the “law of the father” but rather one centred on the figure of the mother.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Muraro 1991. The text was translated in German (1993), Spanish (1994) and French (2008). In 2018 appeared also the English version of the text, translated by Francesca Novello (Muraro 2018).

⁸¹ Muraro’s efforts belong to the same line of critique of the concept of ‘symbolic order’ as conceptualised by Lacan (for an overview of cardinal concepts in Lacan vast work I am referring to Borch-Jacobsen (1999) [1990] and the attempt to offer an alternative to that concept as carried out – in different ways – by Kristeva and Irigaray, who also engage with Lacanian thought (both having been his students) (Restaino 2002b). Philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray (born 1930), especially in her seminal essay *Speculum* (1974), engages in a critical deconstruction of Western intellectual tradition in both philosophy and psychoanalysis, showing that femininity has been devalued and misinterpreted. The ground on which Irigaray works is the one of visibility / invisibility, as she plays with the idea of *speculum*, a medical instrument allowing doctors to look at the insides of bodies. What the speculum can do is to look at what is invisible but only by looking at it through a mirror. Here there is a critical reference to the ‘mirror phase’ theorised by Lacan (1966), a phase in which little boys and girls commence the process of acquiring their identity as individuals and girls begin the process of identifying as a “lack of something”. This order, argues Irigaray, views woman as a void, an empty space, functioning as an image onto which to project men’s ideas and therefore functioning as a confirmation of his essence. This order is evidently visible also in language, a bearer of the phallogocentric worldview. Therefore, feminist theory is called on to deconstruct language by revealing its phallogocentric structure while at the same time constructing another, woman-centred language and symbolic sphere that celebrates instead of devaluing femininity.

In the symbolic order of patriarchal societies, the mother is the one who gives life while the father the one who grants access to the discursive and normative dimension. In other words, it is by breaking the bond with the mother (body / private sphere) and constructing an alliance with the father (*logos* / law / public sphere) that a child properly enters into civilisation. However, Muraro argues, this construction does not correspond to our experience as embodied beings, brought into the world and to words through the figure of the mother: “the matrix of life is for us also the matrix of the word” (Muraro 2018 [1991]: 40). The figure of the mother⁸² represents the co-generation of being in the

Julia Kristeva (born 1941), linguist and psychoanalyst, also engages with a critique of the Lacanian ‘symbolic order’. The mirror stage implicitly criticised by Irigaray precedes the entrance in the symbolic order, ruled by “the law of the father”. “The order imposed by the law of the father, in Lacanian terminology, is called ‘symbolic order’, and in it the ‘symbols’ are words, discourses, that are different from images and ‘signs’. These belong to the pre-oedipal phase, preceding the mirror phase, that phase that Kristeva will privilege as ‘semeiotic order’ – of the mother – opposing it to the phase of the ‘symbolic order’ of the father” (Restaino 2002b: 50). Kristeva’s aim (especially in Kristeva 1985 [1974]) is not to create a new language or symbolic order but to valorise the pre-discursive sphere in which senses, materiality and affection predominate, understood as a feminine sphere. Muraro engages directly with Kristeva’s notions of ‘symbolic’ and ‘semiotic’ and their discontinuity in chapter 3 (*The Word, a Gift from the Mother*, and especially pp. 40-4).

The references and intellectual traditions with which Muraro engages in this work are not limited to psychoanalysis. She also refers to ‘canonical’ philosophical texts, semiotics, literature, mysticism and theology and other feminist texts. For a complete review of these textual relations and a contextualisation of the work of this text, cf. Murphy 2018, and specifically p. XXVI.

⁸² It is important to underline that the mother is a symbolic figure, according to Muraro. This means the ‘mother’ is not a metaphor for something else; it does not stand for other meanings (for example, ‘womanhood’, ‘mother-sphere’, or other abstractions of the qualities of motherhood or generativity) and neither

world and learning how to speak: “the world was born together with us and with our knowing how to speak” (Muraro 2018 [1991]: 75). More specifically, that is, to speak a language that is ‘aware’ of this co-generation, of the vicinity of things and words. Maternal language⁸³ is thus understood as “the language that takes shape in the exchange between word and experience originally regulated by the mother” (Muraro 2018 [1991]: 73). According to Muraro, this exchange between body and word – what the philosopher calls “the circle of flesh” – is “without any absolute priority to one or the other” (75). This feature is very relevant, as in this case Muraro is saying that there is no perfect coincidence but rather an “abyssal distance”⁸⁴ between “experience and its signification” (Muraro 2018 [1991]: 93), that the speaker should not try to fill it up⁸⁵ but should rather try to stay as close as possible to the

does it stand for an erasure of the actual work done by the actual mother. ‘Mother’ is both literal (i.e. her own mother, to whom she oftentimes refers) and symbolic, that is to say a figure of the co-existence of body-language as primary faculties, experienced in a context of dependence and partiality, into which we are thrown. Muraro refers to this as “non-metaphorical symbolicity of the mother” (Muraro 2018 [1991]: 19) and devotes a whole chapter to this idea (chapter 4, *Or the One in Her Place*).

⁸³ Francesca Novello translates *lingua materna* as “maternal language”; I prefer to use “mother tongue”.

⁸⁴ Muraro specifies that “abyssal” is not used to measure the distance – big, huge, very deep, small – but to state its quality: it cannot be filled.

⁸⁵ For example, via substitutions or abstractions. Muraro had been reflecting, before, on the political importance of a contextual language in a beautiful and complex text that further indicates the depth of her engagement with linguistics (Muraro 1998[1981]). In this book Muraro engages with the theory of signification on the metonymical and metaphorical axis as developed by Roman Jakobson (1966). Muraro observes that, in contemporary society, there is a predominance of signification by abstraction, interpreted as the neglect of material life and of the tendency to rarefy experience, which disappears from this kind of language. Rather, the author reflects on the possibility of a language that is contextual instead of abstract, with her guiding question being:

verge of the abyss. Practicing a partial, relational and ordinary language, close to experience and the context which generates it. In fact, this very gap is what makes language alive and inclined to change,⁸⁶ “as we speak in ways with which we attempt to articulate and verbalize our experiences – to close the ‘abyssal’ gap, *per impossibile*. Through our attempts, the languages we inhabit continually evolve” (Stone 2018: x).

This theory therefore has political connotations insofar as it regards the symbolic dimension, a dimension on which subjects have agency (i.e. patriarchal symbolic can be overturned), and proposes a new horizon of social order based on the figure of the mother (Murphy

search “if and how there is a speaking marked by its material movement and as such, source of intelligence on the world” (Muraro, 1998 [1981]: 115). Signification on the metonymical axe is interesting, according to Muraro, because it produces meaning by indicating rather than re-presenting things. “The specificity of metonymy, and of synecdoche as well, lies in their forming through connections that are found and not invented. [...] While a metaphor originates from an innovative idea, metonymy makes her way through lived experience. Thanks to metaphors the experience is re-formed in an ideal representation, with metonymy instead, it is articulated and expressed in its constitutive parts [*viene articolata nelle sue parti*]” (Muraro 1998 [1981]: 54).

It is interesting to note a sort of ‘metonymical taste’ in most of the names of groups or of texts of Italian feminism that I have presented throughout this dissertation. From place-based connections (the early collectives *Col di Lana* and *Cherubini*, named after the streets where meetings were held or the *Libreria delle Donne* magazine *Via Dogana*, named after the street where the *Libreria* was located) to object-based connections such as the “Little Green Books” (*I libretti verdi*) by *Rivolta Femminile* or the *Green* or *Yellow Catalogue* by the *Libreria*.

⁸⁶ In Muraro’s view, a language that is alive is also a language that plays a political role in resisting conformism, creating new narrations on new subjectivities and avoiding repetitions. The theme of symbolic independence from power and the critique of conventionalism is another frequently addressed topic in the thinker’s reflections (cf. Muraro 1998 and, for an English text, Muraro 2009).

2018:xi). This perspective entails two main implications, according to the analysis by Adriana Cavarero (2002b). First, by proposing a common matrix for life and language, it involves theoretically and practically overcoming the binary economy of patriarchy that divides body from mind. Secondly, the fact that the proposed new order is centred on a mother understood not as a model of femininity but as a principle of a structure of relations (among women) which implies acknowledging disparity and debt. As Cavarero explains:

Far off from evoking an ethic of care already provided in patriarchal codes – to invite all women to ‘realise’ themselves through maternity – the symbolic mother functions as crucial figure of a female order that nominates a relationality among women, and, at the same time, the uneven form of this relation. The innovation of this re-configuration of the maternal sphere consists indeed in being a theory that is not only answering to the dynamics of feminist practice, but also, and crucially, is going beyond binary economy’s stereotypes instead of just overturning them or valorising the feminine pole. Crucially, it is not about a theory of the subject, but of a theory of structure intended as relation. Said otherwise, the question of subject and its constitution, both collective and individual, is here replaced by the question of relation as a practice that is able simultaneously to de-structure the patriarchal symbolic order and to structure a female symbolic order wherein the signification of the individual is generated in its relation with the other [*la significazione della singola si genera nel suo rapporto con l'altra*]. (Cavarero 2002b: 99-100)

The qualification of *theory of structure intended as relation* and not as *theory of the subject* is crucial because it serves to clarify how, in this framework of thought, the concept of difference is comprised not as ‘a thing’ that differentiates women and men but as significance without content. In fact, Muraro views sexual difference as a *signifier*, and as such it is deprived of any content and “is situated not at the level of being, nor at the level of ideas, but in the process of signification of

what is: the level of the significant” (Muraro 2014: 137). It is thus an empty signifier⁸⁷ that signals an intimate ‘being different’ which is internal to each one of us: “Sexual difference is not between, it is in. It is internal to myself, it regards my own existence and this is how I conceive it, I live it, as something that I cannot do without, even if I wanted” (Muraro 2015). This conception of difference highlights the embodied nature of our being in the world and, therefore, our finitude and partiality (Muraro 1985) and is to be filled up with a free sense⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Muraro’s conception of ‘difference’ as an empty signifier reflects the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistics. Language holds a crucial position in Muraro’s theory, as explained by Allison Stone in the preface to the English edition of *The Symbolic Order*: “Muraro regards language as the medium through which the world reveals itself to us [...] it is not, then that language cuts us off from the world as it might really be; instead, language is the condition of the word’s appearing to us and becoming known by us at all” (Stone 2018: IX). Muraro studied Linguistics before devoting herself to Philosophy with neo-Aristotelian philosopher Gustavo Bontadini. Between 1958 and 1960, a period in which structuralism was at its apex in the European intellectual *milieu*, she studied in Belgium and France (Dosse 1997a: XXIV). De Saussure is a key reference for Muraro, and she devoted the first publications of her academic career to his thought (cf. Muraro 1968a, 1968b, 1969). De Saussure’s influence in a conceptualisation of ‘difference’ as being not between entities but constitutive of them is explicitly analysed in Muraro 2015. For a detailed account of Luisa Muraro’s biblio-biography, cf. <http://www.diotimafilosofe.it/autore/luisa-muraro/> (last accessed 18-02-2019), and also Murphy 2018 for an English account of the philosopher education.

⁸⁸ According to Muraro, Feminism of Difference is feminism that “promotes freedom for women not through laws but through relations, referring not to the principle of parity among sexes but in the name of a free sense of sexual difference” (Muraro 2006 [1991]: 159). The definition comes from a postface to the edition, a text written by Muraro in 2006. The English version of the text (Muraro 2018 [1991]) that I have cited so far does not contain this postface; in this case, therefore, the translation is mine.

that is at the disposal of every subject, that is gained through relational practice and that unfolds through language.

7.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have gone over some of the most important texts by *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano: research-oriented texts (the two *Catalogues*), magazines (such as the *Via Dogana* publication), journals, (*Sottosopra Verde*), and books (*Non credere di avere dei diritti*). In doing so, my intention was to outline the richness of the group's intellectual production and delve into the meaning of its political analysis. At the same time, I also chose to recall the processes of textual production so as to show that they constitute an active component of the content of the texts being produced. I have outlined the key theoretical points made by each text, presenting their critiques of Ideological Feminism and the centrality of cultural production for group activity, the concept of "genealogy", the meaning of the practice of "entrustment" and the interweaving of story and theory-making in this group's writing practices. The final section (7.5) devoted specifically to the thought of Luisa Muraro, a leading figure in the bookstore group, concentrated on her theorisation of a 'symbolic order of the mother' and provided a frame of reference for her theoretical appraisal of the concept of 'difference'. Overall, my intention was to provide a portrait of the form of Italian Feminism of Difference as developed by the *Libreria delle Donne* through its texts and practices.

Chapter 8

The organisational life of the *Libreria*: actions and narrations

To sell and to buy; words, silences, discussions.

*Trading news, ideas, money, meetings of two, three, ten or more
people.*

The Bookstore is a space of encounters, exchanges, conflicts, loves.

It's a space-time of experience and knowledge.

(Libreria delle Donne 1980)¹

The previous chapters gave an account of the historical and theoretical relevance of Milan *Women's Bookstore*. Chapter 6 contextualised the project and used documents and texts from the time to present the process culminating in the bookstore's opening in 1975. Chapter 7, by analysing the bookstore's key publications, unpacked its political thought. This chapter is devoted to describing the *Libreria* in terms of its organisational life, and is divided into two sections: the first (8.1) consists of a synthetic overview of *Libreria* activities, member composition and roles while the second (8.2) presents an unpublished 1984 text, a *Brief History of the Libreria*, in which its members narrate the history of the bookstore from its inception from their point of view.

¹ Poster celebrating the 5-year anniversary of the opening of the *Libreria*, *Manifesto di presentazione della Libreria e della sua pratica politica in occasione dei 5 anni dalla nascita*, ALD at FB, Milan, series "Libreria 1980", 1.1. B. 1, F. 9.

8.1. The Bookstore: activities, roles, and decisions

In this section I present an overview of the composition of bookstore activities and projects, highlighting the multiplicity and range of the space, from commercial, political and cultural activities to educational initiatives (8.1.1). I then outline the bookstore's organisation and management (8.1.2), examining the composition, roles and responsibilities of member and the decision-making process.

8.1.1 Bookstore activities

IMG. 15 - Libreria delle Donne. Via Pietro Calvi, Milan
Photo by Laura Giordano. All rights reserved.



Milan Women's Bookstore exists since 1975. From the historical location of Via Dogana 2 it moved to Via Pietro Calvi, in Milano. Milan Women's Bookstore is a diverse and dynamic political reality: it is author of publications and of two trimestral journals (*Via Dogana* e *Aspirina*), organizes meetings, political debates, film screenings, it owns a collection of out of stock and rare

books and it is a meeting point for many women and also men. Of course it sells books, by mail as well. The organisation is extremely agile, reduced to the minimum. The most important things are invented, decided and changed via direct relationship, not by voting. It is a feminist enterprise that does not lay claims on parity but rather is affirming and taking care of women's difference, cultivated through the practice of relations and with the attention to poetry, literature, philosophy. The Bookstore is a place of debates, or rather it is essentially a space that is political, following what we have intended as politics. It has nothing to do with institutions, political parties or groups that are homogeneous. We call it the politics of departing from oneself; it stems from the reflection that each one does on her own experience, from being together in a woman's enterprise but also in the world and is based on relations. But in what we are there is something that cannot be successfully written, something that cannot be reduced to what can be said with words, because one needs to be present here, in order to live and experience it.²

This is the introduction to the *Libreria* that appears on its website, dated 2001. The text is brief yet interesting in that it provides a contemporary description of *Libreria* activities and synthetically touches on its multiplicity, comprising:

- a historical place,
- a political entity,
- a commercial entity,
- a feminist enterprise,
- a space rooted in a specific theoretical orientation (the reference to feminism of difference and *partire da sé* politics) and active in developing political positions.

² From <http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/chi-siamo/> (last accessed 03-02-2019).

It functions as:

- an autonomous publishing house,
- a documentation centre,
- a cultural centre.

From its historical location in Via Dogana 2, a space in the heart of Milano near Piazza Duomo, in 2001 the *Libreria* moved to Via Pietro Calvi 29, an equally central site very near Piazza Cinque Giornate and the busy streets of Viale Montenero and Viale 22 Marzo. Both locations are Municipal properties, and the *Libreria* pays monthly rent to the city. It is active from Monday to Saturday with the following schedule: Monday afternoon from 3:30 to 7:30pm; Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 1:30pm and then 3:30 to 7:30pm, and Saturday from 10am to 1:30pm and then 4 to 7:30pm. The *Libreria* also opens its doors on Sundays for the *Via Dogana* open meetings, held once a month.

In the past, the bookstore tried to obtain permission from the Municipality to remain open all day, from 10:30am to 7:30pm.³ A 1975 letter to Milan's Mayor explains the motivation behind this request, namely that a broader schedule would help in meeting the *Libreria's* statutory mission of also allowing working women, especially those coming from the periphery to the city centre, to benefit from *Libreria* activities during their mid-day break. The municipality replied that, since the *Libreria* is a shop, it must respect local commercial competition laws and the request was thus declined.⁴ This event offers a first indication of the peculiar grounds on which the *Libreria* has stood since

³ In Italy, the liberalisation of shop opening hours was introduced in 2011, with legislation D.L. 201/2011.

⁴ Letter to Milan's Mayor dated 30th October 1975, signed by Giordana Masotto, ALD at FB, Milan, section "Administrative documents", 1.5. B. 8. I could not retrieve exact information on the opening hours of *Libreria* then.

its inception: it is a commercial activity selling cultural objects but run by a political collective with political motives and aims.

The *Libreria* offers a wide range of books, mostly, but not exclusively, written by women. At the beginning, in the Seventies, the bookstore sold only volumes by women. This decision was understood as way to give concrete form to the idea that women, through women's liberation movement, became subjects, able to "speaking up", as is expressed by the words of Giordana Masotto, the first bookstore's librarian:

This materialised in a very concrete fact: the choice of selling only books by women– for example now is not like that anymore because that decision had a historical sense, in that very moment the gesture of that choice was original, I can assure it - and that was in fact a political invention, a cultural one if you want to say cultural, even as an enterprise, no? But fundamentally it was political.⁵

Giordana's word indicates how that approach was understood as innovative in terms of offer but was also historically bound, indeed, today the *Libreria* also sells books authored by men but which are related to the women's movement in terms of content and practice.⁶ Men indeed are present in Libreria and participate either as customers or contributors to some activities. The bookstore diverse catalogue comprises literature and poetry, essays on women's politics, the history and historiography of feminism, the history of women, philosophy, art, architecture and the performing arts as well as a wide range of

⁵ Interview with Giordana Masotto, 15th December 2017, Milan, Bocconi University.

⁶ I was not able to retrieve the moment in which the shift in the type offer from women only to 'mixed' happened.

magazines and feminist journals. *Libreria delle Donne* di Milano also holds rare books (this definition is provided by members of the *Libreria* and the informative sections of the website): to provide a significant example, the *Libreria* has the bibliography of Carla Lonzi and *Rivolta Femminile* in their original editions, *Scritti di Rivolta Femminile*.⁷ These books are currently sold at the *Libreria*, and one copy of each publication is conserved in the *Libreria* Archive.

The move to establish the archive and documentation centre is a material expression of *Libreria* members' interest in not only distributing but also preserving women's production and heritage. The archiving work that the *Libreria* has undertaken since the beginning (conserving a spare copy of every relevant book and keeping a collection of bookshop members' personal archives) can be interpreted as an inevitable act for an organisation working struggling against the tendency to erase women's work and intellectual production from history. For the same reason, the *Libreria* also operates as a documentation centre, collecting and preserving other centres' documents, leaflets, images and manifestos since 1967, as numerous interviews point out. The evidence testifying to this longstanding vocation of archive and documentation centre characterising the bookstore includes letters to other feminist centres on the occasion of the *Libreria's* opening asking for relevant documents and information, as presented in chapter 6.2. Moreover, entries in the *Libreria* daily journal, a device used to organise work and facilitate communication among librarians, dating from 1 October to 1 December 1975 further confirm this archiving work. The journal entry for 16 November 1975, a Sunday, reports that a collective work meeting was held aimed at "ordering the documentation centre (afternoon)", thus testifying to the fact that the *Libreria* was already receiving documents from others

⁷ Cf. chapter 4. I said 'original', as some works by Carla Lonzi published by *Scritti di Rivolta Femminile* have been re-published in 2010 by the Milan-based publishing house *Et/Al*.

centres in 1975.⁸ Traces of this archiving process are visible in the archival structure of Fondazione Badaracco (cf. chapter 3, where I show how the archive is now structured) whose sections 2.1 and 2.2 contain materials from other women's centres and spaces from the first seventies to the nineties. I also observed that several diverse documents (both political and administrative ones, as well as correspondence) bore pencilled notes such as "for the archive" or "archive"; in others, there were dates or annotations concerning archival methods, thus indicating the process of selecting relevant documents to be conserved – a process probably carried out right before the collection was handed over to Fondazione Badaracco.

Other activities take place at *Libreria* as well: there are publicity events for new books, usually with the author her/himself and a journalist, philosopher, or similar figure who comments on and discusses the book and its themes; there are also issue-specific political debates, seminar cycles, contemporary art exhibits and workshops and educational programs. *Libreria* programming is also included in Milanese cultural events such as *BookCity*, a municipal event devoted to the publishing sector consisting in a three-day festival with book presentations and book-related events held in different locations around the city.⁹

⁸ *Agenda degli impegni gestionali giornalieri* (1 ott.-1 dic. 1975), ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1. Moreover, analysing the documentation concerning a 1978 application for funding for cultural activities sponsored by Regione Lombardia, it is possible to deduce that the archive was systematised in 1978. ("Administrative documents", Correspondence 1975-1979, ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8).

⁹ *BookCity Milano* is an event devoted to the publishing field promoted by the Municipality of Milan and BookCity Milano Association (whose members are *Fondazione Corriere della Sera*, *Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, *Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori*, *Fondazione Scuola per Librai Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri*) together with the Italian Publishers' Association (*Associazione Italiana Editori*), Italian Libraries' Association (*Associazione Italiana Biblioteche*) and

All of these activities take place in a special space adjacent to the *Libreria*, a living room-like space where public events are usually held. This space, the *Circolo della Rosa* ("Rose Club"), also hosts other kinds of activities. Besides the activities mentioned above, the political meetings of *Libreria* or club members also take place at the Rose Club, namely the collective study, research or organisational work that the different *Liberia* groups carry out.¹⁰

Here I would like to briefly mention two of the *Libreria*'s many initiatives: the *Scuola di Scrittura Pensante* ("Thoughtful Writing School") and an art project called *Quarta Vetrina* ("Fourth Window"). I choose them not only because they are well-established projects that have been active for over a decade, but also because they both represent activities which are not strictly connected to either feminist politics or bookselling, and as such their public is not restricted to feminists. They might function, therefore, as a way of attracting and socialising new members, or simply as a tool for disseminating knowledge about the *Libreria* more widely.

The writing school is an educational activity that I interpreted as an implicit attempt to engage in the transmission of feminism and feminist heritage. Founded by Luisa Muraro and long-time *Libreria* collective member Clara Jourdan and run from 2007 to 2017, the school's key characteristic can already be seen in its title: *thoughtful*. Indeed, the idea behind it is not only to teach the technical aspects of writing (lexicon, syntax, grammar, rhetoric, etc.) but also to address the connection between language, thought, and independence. The idea

Italian Booksellers' Association (*Associazione Librai Italiani*)
[\[http://bookcitymilano.it/\]](http://bookcitymilano.it/).

¹⁰ See the next section offering a synthetic overview of the main groups and activities.

that it might be possible to teach people this possibility, the possibility of thinking with and through writing, is a challenge the school takes on. “*Thoughtful* writing puts the emphasis on the writing’s capacity to think, not just to express thoughts but precisely to think; a quality that is taken care of and cultivated in the Bookstore.”¹¹ Each edition of the school developed a specific theme captured in a distinct title¹², each of which having to do with the connection between writing and its technical elements, the ability to formulate a thought starting from personal experience and express it in a terse, minimal style, avoiding the temptation of using cliché phrases and ready-made expressions. In teaching writing, the school was also teaching something else. Non only was it obviously a philosophically-oriented writing school (philosopher Luisa Muraro developed her lectures on the basis of the bibliography that accompanied each year’s theme) but, by virtue of its focus on language, the school can ultimately be understood as a way of transmitting feminist heritage,¹³ consciousness and methodologies. I proposed this interpretation to Luisa Muraro during our interview.

M. You were talking about the radical intuition of feminism, and about subjectivity and language, so I was thinking about the *Scuola di Scrittura di Pensante*..in the School you can see this

¹¹ Interview with Clara Jourdan, 12th January 2018, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

¹² For example the school edition of 2014 was entitled *Partire da sé e arrivare ai confini del mondo con la scrittura* (“Departing from oneself, arriving at the word’s ends through writing”), which was devoted to narration. Cf. <http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/puntodivista/scuola-di-scrittura-pensante-anno-2014/> – last accessed 08-07-2019.

¹³ The school closed in 2017. In 2016, another educational program was launched: the “Children’s Philosophy Academy”, an open-access philosophical school for children run by Luisa Muraro. I interpret this new project as another example of activities which are in some way (albeit not intentionally) aimed at establishing a legacy for the *Libreria*.

intuition calling upon you, coming back to life, because you teach how to write but actually you are teaching something else..

Than is true that you said that “you can’t teach everything”, but - this is coming from one that followed the school for three years - everything can be, if you want to learn, everything is a learning subject..

L. Yes. This expression that you used before “in teaching how to write, something else is taught” (“*nell’insegnare come si scrive, o come si può scrivere o come si può migliorare il proprio scrivere, si insegna altro...*”) is a good formula because the writing, the speaking... they originate, they draw from something that is inexhaustible and so, in teaching them, in learning them, we are going towards this other, but not in the sense of *alterity* but rather as a something else, a *beyond*.

M. And in this “towards something else” there is feminism, or feminism intuition.

L. Yes. Surely, for me, this was the attempt – and also the reason for the frustrating tension that teaching writing entails. I did that following a vocation – we could call it that way because maybe teaching is really a vocation.¹⁴

Another project located in the *Circolo della Rosa* space is *Quarta Vetrina*, an initiative devoted to contemporary art displays and debates that stems directly from the history of the *Libreria*, founded thanks to donated artwork, in 1975. Conceived in 2001 by Corrado Levi, from 2006 onwards it was curated by Donatella Franchi, and since 2015 by Francesca Pasini. The project began as a way of introducing a conversation about visual languages into the bookstore, a place mostly

¹⁴ Interview with Luisa Muraro, 30th November 2018, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan. Regarding the expression “you can’t teach everything”, I was referring to a Luisa Muraro book, “Non si può insegnare tutto” (Muraro and Fanciullacci 2014).

concerned with written texts, as Donatella Franchi explained to me in our interview.¹⁵ Moreover, as an artist herself, Franchi felt that her role in running the project was to highlight the transformative potential of artistic practices; to this end she conducted a research-oriented program devoted to analysing artistic processes in their unfolding. As an art critic and curator, Francesca Pasini's approach is quite different. The format is instead devoted to providing an extensive showcase and analysis of artistic works, once a month, in order to highlight the abundance and flourishing of women's art in the contemporary art system. The program is conceived as a way to grant space to and communicate the diverse research practices of the multitude of female artist who have entered the contemporary art scene since the Nineties, in a process that Pasini related to the history of the *Libreria's* mission: "today there is a multitude of women artists. It is somewhat like what happened in the Eighties, with women writers invading publishing houses all over the world".¹⁶ The invited women artist shows a site-specific, original piece in the bookshop window (a glass display window measuring about 2x2 meters). On the occasion of the vernissage, Pasini as curator organises a public encounter with the artist.¹⁷

¹⁵ I interviewed Donatella Franchi on different occasions. Apart from another long interview on her own artistic practice that I conducted in 2015 for a research project on women artists and their careers, a first interview explicitly connected to this thesis was conducted via telephone call on 28th March 2018. Then via a set of questions via email (3rd April 2018), and finally a long interview at her own house in Bologna (6th April 2018), where was present also Letizia Bianchi, fellow member of feminist group *Lavinia Fontana*. Donatella Franchi also helped me in contacting and interviewing the women of *Libreria delle Donne* in Bologna.

¹⁶ Interview with Francesca Pasini, 26th March 2018, via email.

¹⁷ The list of the artists from 2015 to January 2019 is: Marta Dell'Angelo, Alice Cattaneo, Concetta Modica, Elena El Asmar, Margherita Morgantin, Maria Papadimitriou, Eugenia Vanni, Goldschmied & Chiari, Maria Morganti, Chiara

8.1.2. Bookstore management

Libreria delle Donne di Milano is run by a cooperative, *Cooperativa delle Donne Sibilla Aleramo*, founded in 1975 by 15 women.¹⁸ Today it has around 80 associates,¹⁹ but it is also composed of more women who are involved in some activities and regularly spend time there. It is not easy to quantify the number of people involved in the *Libreria*, but an estimation of its scope can be made by looking at its web and social media profiles, which reach around 5,000 people.²⁰

There is a multi-faceted type of involvement at the *Libreria* wherein different roles may overlap: the owners (in this case, cooperative members) are sometimes also employees, the employees are also customers, and the customers may also be members of the political or research groups. In fact, there are not many customers who are ‘only’ customers (in the sense that they are not involved in the life of the *Libreria*). This point was expressed in interviews, notably with

Camoni, Claudia Losi-Sabrina Mezzaqui (they realised a common work), Gabriella Ciancimino, Marina Ballo Charmet, Enrica Borghi, Paola Di Bello, Caterina Saban, Loredana Longo, Marzia Migliora, Bruna Esposito, Sophie Ko, Elisa Sighicelli, Christiane Lohr, Ina Otzko, Angela Passarello, Paola Anzichè, Stefania Galegati Shines, Vittoria Chierici, Annie Ratti, Alessandra Caccia. For further reference regarding the *Quarta Vetrina* project, see Rossetti 2018. A retrospective exhibition devoted to the display of *Libreria*’s artworks (comprising also the historical works composing the “Cartella delle artiste” and some of the paintings sold for supporting the *Libreria* opening in 1975, cf. chapter 6) as well as the images coming from contemporary art project *La Quarta Vetrina* opened at *La Fabbrica del Vapore*, Milan, on April 2019 (Exhibition *Vetrine di Libertà*, 1 April – 6 June 2019).

¹⁸ Regarding its foundation, see chapter 6, paragraph 6.2.

¹⁹ As expressed in the interview with Renata Dionigi, 13th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

²⁰ The *Libreria*’s Twitter account has almost 3,000 followers and the Facebook page has around 5,000 followers [data updated as of 18 September 2018].

administrator Assunta Lunardi,²¹ and confirmed by observation of the patterns of relationship between participating in *Libreria* activities and making purchases.

Frequently, customers became members of the *Libreria*. Besides the funding group, many of the people who arrived at the *Libreria* according to various life paths decided to work there in a way or another as a sign of what they call *riconoscimento*, a trending word in my interviews where women speak about the different ways feminism and the *Libreria* have changed their lives – for the better.

Indeed work at the *Libreria* is carried out in service to a political belief but also as a specific act of gratitude towards the *Libreria*, as well as enjoyment of the work itself. In fact it is very important to underline that when referring to voluntary workers in the *Libreria* context I am referring to the voluntary work given by the cooperative members. In this sense volunteering underlines the gratuitous and free employment of one's work and time and not a specific form of engagement.

G. I was happy to quit and resign from where I was working, even if the pay was good, the work was comfortable and the job permanent, because this one.. [sighs] it was the venture of a lifetime..²²

The *Libreria*'s day-to-day operations are covered by a rotating shift system involving various volunteer librarians who fall into one of two categories: there are usually 2 so-called *turniste* (literally: "shift

²¹ Interview with Assunta Lunardi, 17th January 2018, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

²² Interview with Giordana Masotto, 15th December 2017, Bocconi University, Milan.

workers”) in the morning and 2 in the afternoon, accompanied by the *libraia* (“bookseller”), an individual who is more stable but likewise unpaid. The *libraia* spends more time at the store, usually every morning, and has more experience and skills. I asked the long-time bookseller Renata,²³ who worked at the *Libreria* for 20 years, to recall what a typical day in *Libreria* life was like:

R. I come in and two shift workers are already right beside me. Then we start doing the accounts. Then some books arrive, we open [the book boxes] together – now we register them with the computer, once we had the file cabinet – and then each one of us had her book sector to take care of, this not happening anymore [laugh] while back then she took care of It, maybe even suggesting me [to order] some books, so there was this collaboration, sharing, everyone participating. I find this thing very different from one telling the others what to do, yes.

Then some women came in and we spent time chit chatting, or they wanted a book, or a sales person came in and in that case I was the one dealing with him. Then the books were arriving, the women who were there opened them, if they wanted to. But only if they wanted, you see: it was not compulsory that shift workers had to open the box. We opened the box, they gave it to me and of course I classified them [the box’s books], ordered them in the file cabinet. And then other women came, it was a very passionate, very active moment, women coming by, telling us about good things, bad things, we were hosting conversations [*facevamo grandi salotti*] and it was really nice – but always taking care of practical things. At one pm we closed, we did the accounts, and then in the afternoon there was a diary keeping the communication between us [the shift workers of the morning and the ones of the afternoon] so if there was something pending I wrote it on the diary for them to see it, or they [the afternoon shift workers] wrote on the diary, for example they might write

²³Interview with Renata Dionigi, 13th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

to me “tomorrow is coming a woman that wants to by lots of books” something like that, you see.

The work – punctuated by moments of socialising – is organised through the basic practice of scheduled shifts and the mediating tool of the daily journal where the morning and afternoon *turniste* leave their messages and communicate.²⁴ This shared daily journal has been used since the shop opened in 1975.

There are no others such ‘formal’ tools: the rest, the members say, works by willingness, cooperation, responsibility and reciprocal trust. Indeed, perhaps volunteering is not an adequate expression to capture the nature of this act of giving one’s time, competences and resources for a common project. Perhaps a better word would be *gratuitousness*, signalling the *passione*, *radicamento*, and *costanza*²⁵ required by this kind of activity.

Besides the *turniste* and *libraia*, the remaining ‘staff’ engaged in bookstore management is comprised of one person who takes care of the administration and is physically present in the library every other day, and an external accountant. This is the basic structure, but it is enriched by a continuous dialogue with other women from the *Libreria* (see below) who are informed about and oversee its management, such as founder Lia Cigarini and editorial consultant and expert Lilliana Rampello who offer advice about building and developing the catalogue. When I say “women from” or “women of” the *Libreria*, I intend the more stable members of the organisation. The *Libreria* is formally a cooperative but there are many women who contribute to bookstore life in a fairly stable manner yet might not be formal members of the cooperative.

²⁴ Cf. section 8.1.1.

²⁵ The expression is from Giannotti 2014: 53.

Since the *Libreria* is more than a commercial activity, running it encompasses other roles and kinds of occupations besides those having to do with bookstore management. To be part of the *Libreria* and support its operation may involve working for the bookstore management, giving time and resources to organise the cultural events, or contributing in other ways. Participants give whatever it is they have to give, be it time, resources, or intellectual labour:

We wanted it to be a collective endeavor, that is to say everyone – no one was obliged to do the shift – but a way to be present was also to give a bit of your time. If it was not the shift, you could help in doing something else. And you didn't have to do something if you didn't have any time to share.²⁶

Besides the voluntary nature of the work, another relevant element of *Libreria* organisation is the fact that every single activity is designed, organised and carried out by specific issue-based groups. The following is a synthetic overview of the working groups and their activities. These are the groups that I was able to map during my time at the *Libreria*, which means that they are the more active ones, those more often referred to by participants.²⁷

²⁶ Interview with Giordana Masotto, 15th December 2017, Bocconi University, Milan.

²⁷ I do not exclude that there are other groups as the aggregations in *Libreria* are many and informal, but I did not have enough material on them. For example, there is the *Gruppo di Storia Vivente*, a research group working on Women's Oral History.

- The editorial staff of *Via Dogana* produces the magazine (1981-1983; 1991-today).²⁸ Besides the traditional editorial group, the organisational structure also entails a *redazione allargata* (“extended editorial group”), a phrase indicating a moment of broad public discussion aimed at gathering relevant political interests and constructing a shared dialogue. Besides the editorial groups, of course, there are also many people who contribute to the journal as writers.
- The *Libreria* website editorial staff created the site and has been managing it since 2001. This group meets every Thursday and sets the weekly content of the website (writing articles and reviews and editing article proposals, selecting relevant news items, etc.), which usually goes online Friday morning.
- The Labour group, devoted to reflecting on the job market and systems and women’s employment. The group is composed of women from different backgrounds but predominately lawyers, economists, and managers. It writes and is responsible for the website session in *Agorà del Lavoro*; it also wrote the 2009 *Sottosopra* on work titled “Imagine Work”.²⁹
- The *Lab Mi* Group is focused on analysing and conceptualising contemporary modes of planning and living in socio-urban spaces. The group is composed of women from different backgrounds but specifically architects, architecture professors, and urban planners. It curates and hosts public meetings and seminars on cityscapes and urban living.
- *Estia*, the relational cuisine group, provides relational encounters and dinners for the association’s events. It is composed of women from different backgrounds. The group collectively wrote the book *Fuochi. La cucina di Estia* (2014).

²⁸ Cf. section 7.2 on the *Via Dogana* publications.

²⁹ On the *Sottosopra* publications, cf. section 7.3.

The groups follow a key pattern in setting up the activities or public events taking place in the *Libreria*: the conviction that the ideational and practical aspects of a project must be treated together. Therefore, instead of having different people assigned to different functions, the person interested in doing an activity is responsible for the whole spectrum of sub-activities, from conceptualising and producing texts to relating with the press and setting up the space. According to Renata, this represents an effort to avoid reproducing a division of labour in which intellectual activity is conceptualised as more important than concrete, material tasks.

R. We valued materiality [*materialità*] greatly. Materiality and thought are tightly connected and they are extremely important in running a cooperative, a space like... [...] Who is doing the activity is doing it all the way round: materiality and thought are connected. Women doing an activity – you, see, now they are doing something about Art, they are the ones setting up the room, they organise to communicate with the press, they are the ones checking that the relative book is in stock... you see, there are not different roles but one is doing everything.³⁰

Renata was pointing towards the other side of the room, near the shop windows, at curator Francesca Pasini and artist Marzia Migliora, who were busily talking, organising – the *Quarta Vetrina* vernissage was to take place that evening – and then arranging the space for the debate by bringing in chairs, setting up the microphones, and preparing the display.

³⁰ Interview with Renata Dionigi, 13th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

R. You see? They are preparing everything – Talking about doing things... You see? The other one is dusting... It's them, you see!³¹

The structure of the *Libreria* is thus comprised of a constellation of working groups who contribute to its activities. There are no formalised moments devoted to strategic planning or decision-making, nor are there any fixed roles or hierarchies. In fact, the cooperative statute, although registered since 1975, has virtually never been applied: in 43 years, the *Libreria* has never had a voting assembly. Everything is carried out according to a given participant's willingness to engage in the project and take responsibility (form a team, find the resources and take care of all the phases of the project, from the more content-based, intellectual ones to the logistic, practical aspects), but also to her desires and skill set. A lively network of participants is there throughout the process to offer advice, critique, support, etc.³²

8.1.3. Bookshop sales

For financial support, the *Libreria* relies exclusively on bookshop sales (until 2014 there was also a subscription fee to for the magazine *Via Dogana*) and spontaneous donations (that is, they do not have membership programs or require donations in any form; to offer an example, at the time when *Via Dogana* was by subscription, some women paid an amount slightly in excess of their annual subscription fees to sustain the *Libreria*). Moreover, the *Libreria* does not sell any kind of stationary or merchandise (unlike other historical feminist places such as the *Feminist Library* bookshop in London and *Librerie des Femmes* in Paris, both of which sell 'branded' tote bags).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cf. Appendix 4, "Synthetic Timeline of *Libreria* key texts and key projects" for an overview of its activities.

Bookshop sales in 2018 amounted to around 5500 units. Of this, 96% of sales were made directly in the *Libreria* while orders represented 4%, a clear indication of how closely purchases are connected to customers' physical presence at the *Libreria*. As table 7 shows,³³ the best-selling category is Women's Politics accounting for 39% of the overall sales volume, followed by Fiction (27%) and Philosophy (10%).³⁴

³³ The categories presented in the table were formulated by the author on the basis of the bookshop's own sales analysis (material retrieved in the interview with administrator Assunta Lunardi during our conversations on 17th January 2018 and 24th September 2018, with an update in July 2019; the overview of sales analysis was carried out using the bookshop management software *Byblos*). I respected the macro categories used by the *Libreria* but aggregated some items. For example, I created the category "Art, Performing Arts, Architecture" bringing together the librarian categorisations Art, Architecture, Dance, Cinema, Theatre, Photography. The section "Other" consists of various areas such as Travel, Leisure, and Health. Percentages for the sections "science", "comic strips" and "religion" are respectively 0,5%, 0,3% and 0,2%.

³⁴ This is consistent with an analysis of the composition of the bookstore catalogue (analysis of 2018 titles) that shows the bookstore's main focus as being on Fiction (37%), Women's politics (12%) and Philosophy (9%).

TAB. 7 - Percentage of units sold per book category, 2018

PERCENTAGE OF UNITS SOLD PER BOOK CATEGORY	
Women's politics	39%
Fiction	27%
Philosophy	10%
Art, Performing arts, Architecture	4%
Biographies	3%
Poetry	3%
Friends of women	2%
Other	2%
History	1%
Children & teenagers	1%
Literary critique	1%
Psychology & Psychoanalysis	1%
Religion	1%
Journals and magazines	1%
Labour, Law, Economics	1%
Sociology / Anthropology	1%
Cuisine	1%
Science	0%
Comic strips	0%
Motherhood	0%

The overall distribution of the most-sold categories, listing Fiction, Women's Politics and Philosophy in the top three most-sold categories is stable in the years. The same pattern in fact can be found when looking at sales from 2001: the sales distribution categories show the same structure, testifying to the fact that the core of the *Libreria* offering is women's politics, philosophy and fiction.³⁵

TAB. 8 - Sales volume from 2001

YEARS	QUANTITY	QUANTITY PER YEAR ³⁶
2001-2005	19,849	3,970
2006-2010	32,368	6,474
2011-2015	35,953	7,191

However, while the most sold category in the previous years has been Fiction, in 2018 the most sold category has been Women's Politics. The increase in sales in this category led the overall yearly sale increase in respect to 2017 (+21%).

In terms of cost structure, the rent, although set at a favourable rate, is the main expense together with book purchasing.³⁷ Overall,

³⁵ I wanted to look at sales before and after 2001 but I could not. In fact, unfortunately, it is not possible to analyse sales before 2001, as it is with the relocation that *Libreria* started employing a computerised bookstore management system.

³⁶ Estimate.

³⁷ They do not have any more the possibility of buying in *conto vendita* but of course they can do the return policy.

ensuring the economic side of the enterprise is “hard, very hard”, as Assunta Lunardi, the woman in charge of administration, notes. Assunta devotes her time to *Libreria* four days a week, contributing the specific skills acquired in her training as an accountant.

8.2 The Bookstore talking about its organisation

At this point I would like to present a text that is particularly significant in that it constitutes one the few documents *Libreria* members have written devoted to narrating the *Libreria's* history in a way that showcases its organisational life. According to the annotations on the top right of the first page of the document, the text was to be sent to the Municipality of Milan for a project focused on women's spaces in the city. It was thus meant to be read by a public audience, not addressed only to members of the organisation. As organisations are but temporary reifications of an ongoing organising process that can be glimpsed in retrospective accounts (Czarniawska 2004b), I view this document as important in that it offers a retrospective conceptualisation of the *Libreria's* organisational life by its own members. I would therefore like to devote some space to this text, not only because organising appears in this narration as a dimension in its own right, but also because it is through this retrospective sense-making exercise that we are offered a temporary materialisation of the *Libreria delle Donne* as organisation.

There are two versions of the text, both held at the Fondazione Badaracco.³⁸ The first is dated 1984 and is conserved in the

³⁸ See Chapter 3 for a narration of how I recovered this document. Its retrieval in the administrative section of the archive reinforces the idea that the document is conceptualised as being *organisational* rather than *political* in nature.

administrative section of the *Libreria* Archive.³⁹ It contained erased passages and changes, suggesting that the text was still in-progress, but the fact that the 'official' letterhead of *Libreria delle Donne* is used for the first page, together with handwritten comments by *Libreria* members at the end of the document, indicate that it was a semi-final draft. Another version, dated 1979-1980, is located in the Luisa Muraro Archive. A pencil note at the top of the page explicitly indicates that it was an early draft, literally the *prima stesura*.⁴⁰ I will outline the 1984

³⁹ *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5. B. 10, F. 1). The text is a photocopy.

⁴⁰ *Storia della Libreria delle Donne* (handwritten annotation "*prima stesura*"), typewritten text, 2 pages and *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text (annotation in pencil 1979 or 1980), 3 pages, conserved at ALM at FB, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1.

The texts conserved in the ALM archive, in the same envelope, are different drafts versions. The document that I believe to be the earliest draft is titled *Storia della Libreria delle Donne – Prima stesura*, a phrase that is handwritten in pencil, thus suggesting that it was written as an *ex post* evaluation, probably by Luisa Muraro, and the phrase *prima stesura* refers to the fact that there is a second, more mature text. This would be *Breve Storia della Libreria* (1979 or 1980).

The 1984 text conserved in the ALD archive (cf. note 2) is comprised of two parts. While the first page bears the title *La Libreria delle Donne – Sue caratteristiche, sua storia, in breve*, what should be the second page has another title, *Breve Storia della Libreria*, which corresponds to the draft version by Luisa Muraro. Why is that? I suggest two explanations: the first is that the document was still a draft, so the document bears two possible incipits, two options to be reviewed. The other hypothesis, which I am now inclined to see as more meaningful, is that the first page functions as a sort of abstract or summary of the life of *Libreria*, while the second part, a three-page-long text, is the 'actual' narrative. Analysing the version conserved at ALD and at ALM my hypothesis is that the text has been written in 1979/1980 by Luisa Muraro and then used in 1983/4 for a presentation that never happened, to which it has been added a first page of synthetic incipit. This would also make sense keeping in mind its

text, referred to as the “main text”, while offering comments on the first draft – referred to as the “draft version” – in the case of significant discrepancies worth noting. As the handwritten comment on the right side of the first page notes, this text was addressed to the Municipality of Milan for a project called *Guida ai luoghi delle donne*. I searched for traces of this project (in the Milan Municipal Archive and National Library System) but could not find any: my provisional conclusion is that the project never took place and therefore the text that *Libreria* prepared for it was never published. In recalling this project, my interviewees agree that the text was not published.

Although this text does display the same dense, intense and spare language typical of other *Libreria* publications, it is simpler than others, perhaps because of its intended interlocutor.⁴¹ The text describes organisational issues and explains the meaning behind their choices, making it an interesting document for observing the *Libreria*’s perception of its organisation at that moment in time. I therefore consider this document to be highly relevant, as the rich description in the text reveals organising as a dimension in its own right, making it visible. The occasion of a Municipal project on women’s places seems to have given the *Libreria* the opportunity to look back on its organisational life and to narrate this self-reflection. In fact, narrations about the bookstore by its members (as opposed to other texts – journals, pamphlets, etc. – by the *Libreria*) are available beginning from around 1975 but they are examples of stories about the vision and

possible editorial destination: a guide on women’s spaces by the Municipality might have entailed a request for a sort of ‘abstract’ followed by a more complete description. Precisely because the issues addressed by the ‘two parts’ of the documents are the same, I do not separate them in the analysis; this choice also aids in avoiding excessive complexity for my readers.

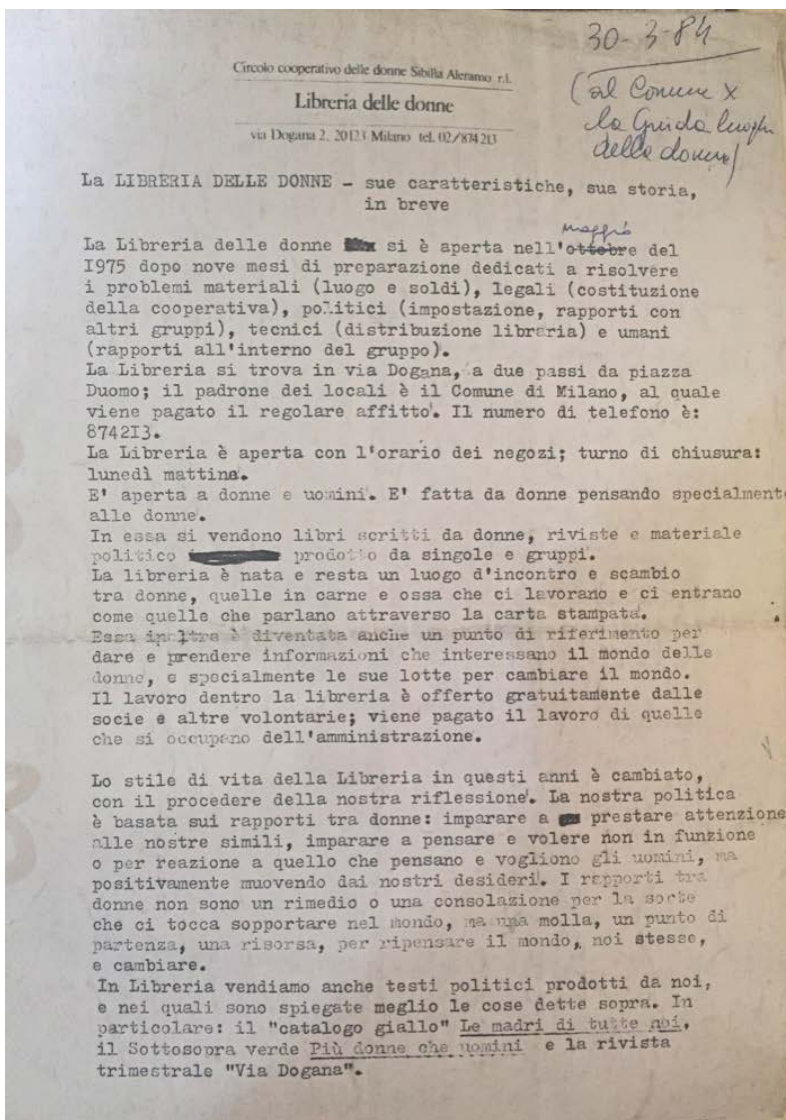
⁴¹ I would have liked to find out more about the project but I was not able to locate any additional information.

ideals underlying this project-to-be.⁴² This text is instead a retrospective account of the life of the *Libreria* after it had been open for some time and was written in a moment of great activity and centrality for the intellectual life of *Libreria*, seeing as 1983, the year the document underwent its second draft, is also the same year that *Sottosopra Verde* was published.⁴³

⁴² See the documents presented in chapter 6.

⁴³ See chapter 7.

IMG. 16 – *Breve Storia della Libreria* (1984), typewritten text, 4 pages.
 ALD at FB, Milan (1.5, B. 10, F. 1). All rights reserved. Courtesy of Fondazione Badaracco, Milan.



Breve storia della Libreria delle donne di Milano, via Dogana 2

Per anni ci siamo riunite in casa di questa o di quella - con questi incontri, si sa, è incominciato il movimento delle donne: fine del nostro isolamento, fine della devozione esclusiva agli interessi maschili. ~~Ma~~ Però ci è venuto di pensare: ~~se~~ in casa di questa o quella ci vanno quelle che si conoscono tra loro, e così le donne stanno sempre in posti cui sono legate dagli affetti; ci vuole qualcosa'altro, un posto dove vai sconosciuta, senza essere invitata, senza affetti precisi, senza l'obbligo di essere gentile. E poi ci vuole un posto dove possano ritrovarsi quelle che, per qualche ora o per tutta la vita, non vogliono stare in famiglia.

Così ci siamo messe a cercare dei locali da affittare e li abbiamo trovati in via Dogana, vicino a piazza Duomo, un posto facile da raggiungere perché è in centro. Il Comune di Milano, padrone dei locali, ce li ha affittati ad un prezzo ragionevole. I locali erano perfetti per noi perché si aprono sulla strada, e la nostra idea era proprio questa: un posto in cui si entra passando direttamente dalla strada, un posto pubblico. Restava da stabilire che altre caratteristiche ~~dagli~~ alcune volevano farne un locale dove si va a bere, mangiare, chiacchierare e aperto solo alle donne. Per vari motivi abbiamo deciso di farne una libreria, aperta a tutti ma fatta da donne per le donne. Tra i vari motivi c'era anche la voglia di fare ~~cont~~ i conti con la cultura. La cultura intimidisce un po' quelli che non la controllano, e questa timidezza spesso porta ~~alcune~~ a subire le idee altrui e a sottovalutare il ~~proprio~~ ^{nostro} sapere.

Per puro caso la preparazione della Libreria è durata proprio nove mesi. Non nego che ci sia una qualche somiglianza col fatto della gravidanza, ma c'erano anche grosse differenze. Il bambino si forma per un processo spontaneo, naturale, ordinato; invece il nostro lavoro era tutto esplicito, artificiale e anche un po' disordinato. C'era da raccogliere soldi, regolare le questioni ~~di~~ burocratiche, interpellare e interessare il movimento delle donne, definire l'impostazione di fondo, ~~definire~~ imparare il mestiere di libraio.

Risolti questi problemi, o almeno una parte di essi, la Libreria si è aperta nell'ottobre 1975. In effetti alcuni problemi si sono ripresentati ma, con la libreria aperta, avevano più ~~dei~~ criteri e concretezza per discuterli. E naturalmente si sono presentati nuovi problemi. Per esempio quello dei nostri rapporti con le donne che frequentano la libreria. Alcune vengono con delle segrete aspettative che non riusciamo a indovinare o che non sappiamo soddisfare, e magari se ne vanno deluse, col sentimento di essere state trattate male. Cosa fare? sforzarci di essere sempre all'altezza? bisognerebbe fingere, fingere di valere e essere più di quello che siamo... (si è)

La soluzione è venuta in altro modo: col passare degli anni ~~si è~~ attenuata la distinzione tra le donne della Libreria e le altre. Molte che erano, come dire, nostre clienti, hanno finito per fermarsi qui a lavorare, qualche ora alla settimana o anche di più; sono così entrate nella gestione della Libreria portando qualcosa che il gruppo iniziale non aveva. Si capisce che alcune si sono fermate il tempo che gli è durato l'entusiasmo e poi basta, ma non è cosa da poco, godere della presenza di una persona entusiasta. A parte questo, ci sono ~~anche~~ invece le fedelissime, che in libreria portano costanza, continuità, e vivono i momenti di entusiasmo come quelli di salutare.

C'è poi la questione dei libri, della carta stampata, della cultura. ^(In) Libreria vendiamo esclusivamente cose prodotte da donne, senza fare questione di qualità, di argomento, di importanza. Il che però non ci impedisce di avere delle nostre idee e di formulare dei giudizi su quello che vendiamo. Ne parliamo tra noi e qualche volta prendiamo posizione pubblicamente. Per esempio gli anni scorsi molti editori si sono lanciati sul filone del femminismo, con pubblicazioni ~~superficiali~~ ^{superficiali}, senza rapporto con la pratica politica delle donne. A questo fatto ~~noi~~ ^{multo} abbiamo reagito dando una netta preferenza ai romanzi e suscitando la diffidenza per tutti i prodotti con ~~l'etichetta~~ ^{l'etichetta} femminista. Non vogliamo sopravvalutare la nostra forza ma neanche ignorarla. La libreria infatti serve da collegamento, raccoglie e passa informazioni, tiene contatti con altre librerie di donne e con vari gruppi, anche fuori d'Italia e quando abbiamo da dire qualcosa, lo diciamo.

A proposito, ci pare di notare negli scritti e nei discorsi di alcune donne una certa tendenza a ignorare quello che altre ~~discorsi~~ hanno detto o fatto, come se ci fosse per le donne una certa difficoltà ad attribuirsi un passato, una ~~storia~~ ^{storia} storia, a parte quella familiare. E' una faccenda complessa, comunque abbiamo pensato di fare qualcosa che forse può servire a correggere questo difetto di memoria storica e di spessore collettivo: abbiamo fatto un archivio in cui raccogliamo i documenti del movimento delle donne dal 1967 in avanti.

L'archivio si trova nel sottoscala della Libreria, dove c'è anche un posto di riunione che stiamo fornendo di tutto quello che serve, ventola dell'aria compressa, per renderlo il più piacevole possibile. Servono in effetti molte cose per via che ~~in~~ tutte tendiamo a ritrovarci nel locale principale, quello in cui si vendono i libri e che è ovviamente il più frequentato; lì si discute, si chiacchiera, si scherza e avvengono le cose. Per cui quelle che si trovano a leggere o lavorare nel sottoscala risalgono, quelle che si trovano nel soppalco che fa da ufficio amministrativo, scendono. La cosa è simpatica, d'accordo, ma noi vorremmo reagire a ~~questo~~ questo potere accentratore del negozio, vorremmo che in Libreria capitassero più cose contemporaneamente - senza contare che l'amministrazione deve essere curata, per amore o per forza.

La Libreria, dal punto di vista legale, è una cooperativa. La cosa burocratica più divertente è stata quando siamo andate dal notaio per l'atto di costituzione della cooperativa. Alcune si erano vestite bene, una si era perfino messa un grande cappello, ed eravamo tutte un po' emozionati; io ero più allegra di quando mi sono sposata (vero è che il mio matrimonio non fu molto allegro).

~~sono~~ I soldi che guadagniamo - non sono tantissimi - vengono usati per la Libreria e le sue attività. Oltre alle spese fisse, stampiamo ogni tanto qualcosa, paghiamo il lavoro di una di noi, quella che si occupa maggiormente dell'amministrazione, e poi portiamo dei miglioramenti ai locali. L'estate scorsa abbiamo fatto fare un nuovo pavimento; quello di prima, tutto dissestato, era coperto da un feltro grigio che mandava un sacco di polvere (i libri, si sa, chissà quanto la polvere).

Ogni cosa ~~che si fa~~ viene discussa in gruppo, in vere e proprie riunioni oppure come capita. E' indispensabile, perché ~~la~~ *la Libreria* ~~libreria~~ va avanti soprattutto col lavoro volontario di molte che a turno assicurano la propria opera, c'è quindi bisogno di ritrovarsi per scambiare le esperienze e i problemi. Logicamente si fanno molte riunioni, ce ne sono nell'intervallo di colazione, nel tardo pomeriggio, la sera, ci sono riunioni affollate, semideserte, appassionate, stracche, estrese o noiose, polemiche o pacifiche. Dipende. Alcune dicono che le riunioni sono troppe, altre pensano che non sono mai abbastanza. Dipende.

Non siamo mai state un gruppo omogeneo e non lo saremo probabilmente mai. Certo, abbiamo delle cose in comune. Siamo abbastanza d'accordo nel pensare che ritrovarci tra donne sia una cosa fondamentale; dopo anni di esperienza su questo punto non abbiamo cambiato idea. A questa posizione comune ognuna poi aggiunge del suo e le differenze si moltiplicano. Siamo diverse perché la società ci ha fatte tali ma anche perché noi ci siamo riconosciute diverse e la nostra politica non ci impone di essere uguali. C'è quella che si legge cinque quotidiani e quella che diffida sistematicamente della carta stampata, c'è quella che ha piantato la famiglia, quella che continua ad amarla e quella che se la tiene senza amarla; una prende sul serio il suo lavoro, una non trova lavoro e un'altra non lo cerca nemmeno perché detesta lavorare, c'è la ritardataria, la pignola, la concettosa, la poetica... Così la Libreria è tenuta un po' come la casalinga cura la casa, l'imprenditore lombardo gestisce l'azienda, il pastore sardo vigila sui suoi beni: un misto di accuratezze femminili, prudenza contadina, efficacia imprenditoriale. Con questa combinazione di cose contrastanti noi cerchiamo di giocare per ~~avere~~ *inventare* e realizzare qualcosa che ~~stato~~ *può* andar bene alle donne.

di nuovo

Mi piace. Elena

ha lo bello e vero - Bobi

Un po' mollosa - Riuscita + provata

8.2.1 A narrative account of the Women's Bookstore: "*La Libreria delle Donne – sue caratteristiche, sua storia, in breve*"

The first paragraph opens with the following line:

The *Libreria delle donne* opened in May 1975⁴⁴ after nine months of preparation devoted to resolve material (place and money), legal (cooperative constitution), political (planning and relation with other groups), technical (book distribution) and human (relationship within the group) problems.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The first line of the text presents a handwritten correction that substitutes October 1975 as the date the bookstore opened (a piece of information that is consistent with documents such as invitations to the opening and other communications – see chapter 6) with May 1975, that is, the date the cooperative was established. In the body of the text, another passage again refers to the opening as October 1975. This date is also provided in the first draft in the Luisa Muraro Archive. Why did 'the editor(s)' change the incipit of the text, writing "May" instead of "October"? And why did they do so in the incipit and not in the body of the text? I developed a couple of explanations. One was that the group wanted to underline the fact that the organisation had existed before the official opening of its doors to the public, as it was already active in the funding, communication, etc. phases (see the analysis in chapter 6). However, this explanation might very well be too greatly influenced by what I personally think about organising, ideas I am projecting onto *Libreria* members. I think that another, less fascinating explanation should be considered. The pen used to cross out "October" and substitute it with "May" is different from the one used in other notes in the body of the text, but it is similar to the one used to signal, at the top of the page, the text date and its being destined for the municipality. Might it be that the person who was reviewing the documents and classifying them for the archive, in 1997, simply... recalled the month incorrectly?

⁴⁵ *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5, B. 10, F. 1) and at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).

The text starts right away with a statement upon the organisational process (they call it simply 'preparation') leading to its opening, qualified as material, legal, political, technical and human: thus, the presence of a group in this process is mentioned clearly. The temporality of the opening process is thematised in the following page. The nine months of preparation leading to the opening are compared to the nine months of a gestation. Even if the analogy with the project pregnancy is not explained, apparently dismissed as a "pure chance", it might be a relevant one for the authors, as they keep building on it, pointing out at the differences between the two processes. There is nothing "spontaneous, natural and somehow pre-determined in its result" in a process qualified as "external, artificial and chaotic", requiring fundraising, consensus gathering, acquisition of competences, etc.

The second line states the address and the contact information, opening hours, and specifies that the owner of the spaces is Milan Municipality to whom the *Libreria* pays a "regular rent". This choice might indicate the perceived importance given to the idea of independence and financial sustainability of the *Libreria*; they needed to clarify their independence, removing any doubt regarding a possible public sustain and echoing the 1975 idea that the bookshop:

[...] has to be autonomously sustainable [*deve necessariamente bastarsi*]. That is why the commercial aspect, even if instrumental to the political movement, cannot be neglected. Therefore we will

need to discuss case by case each time that there might be a conflict between commercial and political needs.⁴⁶

And in fact, the second part of the first paragraph talks – albeit very briefly – about the commercial offering comprising books written by women, political documents and feminist publications.

The space is a central point of reflection. From a historical perspective, the group recalls the move from private houses to other spaces. They underline the limits of the house-meeting approach, which re-creates family like behaviours and makes it difficult for outsiders to access the group. They needed a public space instead, and the Via Dogana ones were perfectly suited to their needs: “The space was perfect for us because it was on the street, and that was our idea: a place to be entered directly from the street, a public space”.⁴⁷ Reading this narrative, it almost seems as if the priority in their political practice was to find a public space in which to meet and discuss, and only later did they move on to defining the criteria of the project.

The bookshop is also a meeting space: “The *Libreria* was born as and remains a place for encounters and exchanges among women, those flesh and bones that work here, those that enter here, as well as those that speak through printed paper”.⁴⁸ The phrase might mean that *Libreria* is a place of encounter among subjects (the collective and the customers) and objects – the books. It might further mean that the encounter is between the present and the past. I believe, however, that

⁴⁶ Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne*, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section “Manifesti”, 1.3. B. 1, F. 1.

⁴⁷ *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5, B. 10, F. 1) and at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

this sentence refers to something else entirely, as it is constructed on the subject “women” and names forms of difference not in in status (alive / dead; present / past) but in agency: those who work, those who enter, those who speak. On one hand, this passage expresses the idea that commercial, political and cultural dimension are closely intertwined or co-substantial via the object book. On the other, it indicates a possible conception of heritage (represented by the sum of cultural production by women and conserved and sold in the bookshop) as a subject with a voice that enters into a conversation via the bodily presences of other contemporary subjects. Finally, the first paragraph closes with a reference to the work offered on a volunteer basis by associates and other volunteers, while the administrative work is paid.

After providing this preliminary information (opening process, location and contact information, content and offering of the bookshop) the second paragraph ‘enters’ in the organisational narration. “Libreria lifestyle has changed during these year, together with the progress of our reflections.”⁴⁹ This line condenses the unfolding of a process in which “reflection” (and later on in the text the authors go on to qualify the political and relational nature of such reflection, talking about their groups and publications) and the “lifestyle of the bookshop” – its day-to-day activities, projects, management style, in short its organisational side – develop together in a process of mutual influence. It is the theory-practice chain they are talking about. The use of the term lifestyle [*stile di vita*] further suggests that the authors define the *Libreria* as a living subject.

There were “various” reasons why they opted for a bookshop, they say. One of these (the only one they deemed important enough to cite) was the necessity to come to terms with culture. “There was this need to come to terms with culture. Culture is intimidating for those who don’t master it, and this intimidation oftentimes leads us to be subjected to other’s ideas and to undervalue our own knowledge.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Reflection on cultural issues continues later in the text: “And then there is the question of books, of printed press, of culture.” In order to fight the editorial trend of publishing feminist books without maintaining any connection with women’s politics (“many publishers are now jumping in the feminist stream, with publications that are quite superficial, and without any relation with the women’s political practice”), they stopped selling essays and feminist-labelled production for a time to focus on novels. This, they say, was because they were well aware of the force exerted by novels, their power to aggregate among groups within and outside Italy and therefore “when we have something to say, we do say it.”⁵⁰

The *Libreria* is thus a subject with a lifestyle and, as a subject, it speaks; furthermore, it does so in two ways. The first is through publications (in fact, in 1977 they wrote the pamphlet *Non esiste un punto di vista femminista* on this topic),⁵¹ the second one is via their commercial activity (the choice to temporarily stop offering feminist essays).

The next paragraph builds on the question of culture, discussing the difficulty women face in creating a common heritage. They notice a tendency to

[...] ignore what other women have said or done, as if women has a sort of difficulty in claiming a past, a history, besides the family one. It is a complex issue, yet we thought of doing something that maybe could help in correct this deficiency in historical

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Cf. chapter 7, section 7.1.

memory: we set up an archive where we collect women movement's documents from 1967 onwards.⁵²

They thus present the archive and documentation centre established by the *Libreria* as a means of responding to this lack of historical memory among women – once again connecting a theoretical or political need to an activity. The archive is located in the bookstore's cellar, a floor that also hosts a space devoted to meetings, oftentimes improved and renovated to render it more hospitable. In fact, they bemoan what they call *il potere accentratore del negozio* that, given its restricted space, makes it more difficult to carry out multiple activities in an osmotic way:

[...] we tend to meet in the main space, the one where books are sold which is obviously the busiest one; there we discuss, converse, joke, and things happen. So the ones that were reading or working in the basement [*sottoscala*] come back up, and those in the loft [*soppalco*] serving as administrative office come back down. It's funny, all right, but we would like to react to the bookstore centralising power, we would like that more things could happen simultaneously in *Libreria*, without mentioning the fact that administration has to be taken care of, out of love or out of necessity [*per amore o per forza*].⁵³

The connection between the need for a more articulated space and the pressing requirements of administering the *Libreria* is not very clear. However, this expression seems to function as a bridge to the next sections that outline the juridical form of the *Libreria*, its managerial

⁵² *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5, B. 10, F. 1) and at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

style and economic side. All the meagre revenues are reinvested in *Libreria* activities (publications, facilities management and administrative work). Roles in the funding groups were not planned *ex ante*. Rather, a section in the first draft, eliminated from the subsequent version, reports that their “competences and talents” emerged during the process of start up (the nine-month period of gestation). During that time, division between the collective, customers and women hanging out at the *Libreria* became blurred and their relations osmotic. In a previous section the authors explain the process according to which women who spent time in the library became involved in running the space. The bookshop, in fact, exists thanks to the “voluntary work of many women, who via planned shifts guarantee their work [the world choice is interesting: *opera*], therefore there is the need to meet and exchange experiences and problems.”⁵⁴

Therefore, each and every decision is made through discussion, either planned meetings (*vere e proprie riunioni*) or *impromptu* ones (*oppure come capita*). The portrait painted by the woman writing is one of continuous exchange: “of course there are many meetings, some in the lunch break, some in the late afternoon, the evening; there are busy meetings, semi-empty meetings, enthusiastic ones, flat ones, brilliant, boring, polemic or peaceful. Some says the meetings are too many, some that they are never enough. It depends.”⁵⁵ It is as if dialogues were invading every moment of *Libreria* life, as if *Libreria* life consists of continuous negotiation.

Meetings are a necessity not only as organisational tools, especially when labour is provided on a voluntary basis, but also to hold political discussions among members of the highly heterogeneous group comprising the collective. From group heterogeneity, the text leaps to the topic of bookstore management in a passage that I consider

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

highly relevant for understanding organisation at the *Libreria*. I have quoted the long closing paragraph in its entirety because I think it is crucial - and beautiful:

We have never been and we will never be a homogenous group. Sure, we do have things in common. We are quite in agreement in thinking that meeting together as women is fundamental; after years of experience we have not changed our mind on this point. To this common position everyone then adds her own and differences multiply. We are different because society made us so but also because we recognised ourselves as different and our politics does not impose us to be equal. There is the one reading five journals a day and the one that is systematically sceptical of printed press, there is the one that left her family, the one that still loves it, and the one that goes on with it without loving it; one is very serious about her job, one can't find a job and another one does not even try as she hates working; there is the one always late, the meticulous one, the intellectual type [*la concettosa*], the poetical one ... In this way [*così*], the *Libreria* is kept a bit like the housewife takes care of the house, the Lombardy entrepreneur runs the firm, the Sardinian shepherd watch over its goods: a mix of feminine attention, farming prudence, entrepreneurial efficacy. We try to play with this combination of contrasting elements in order to invent and realise something new that might be good for women.⁵⁶

The paragraph begins by evoking differences in the group. There is a key point common to them all, however, namely the importance accorded to bonds among women understood as a political issue, and in fact in a previous section of the text the authors state that: "Our politic is based upon relationality among women: learning to pay attention to our kind [*le nostre simili*], learning to think and to want not

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

in function of or in reaction to what men think and want, but starting in positive from our own desires.”⁵⁷ Besides this shared political view, there are numerous differences among them. Not only because each individual is different, but also because the group has conceived difference among women as an element that deserves to be recognised and cultivated. The ironic list of the differences brings us to the end of the document, where the space’s management approach is described. The *Libreria* is run in a composite way: with care, prudence, and efficiency. The use of metaphors connected to Italian regional stereotypes function to reinforce or perhaps justify the management choices. The images triggered by the use of these words, all deriving from a common-sense, popular imagery, depict different worlds (the home, the earth and the soil, the small business), yet all refer to a material, practical way of dealing with things.

The shift between the two parts – differences in the groups and management styles – is conveyed in an interesting way. It is not presented in two different paragraphs. In the same line, the connection between diversity in the group and bookstore management is introduced via ellipsis and the adverb *così*, “like this, thus, in this manner”, thereby suggesting suspension and connection. The text somehow signifies that the comparison is far-fetched yet central. Moreover, as there is only one paragraph, it suggests that the sentence on bookstore management should be read in continuity with the part before. Reading the paragraph as a whole sheds light on the meaning of this *così*. The key idea expressed here is that the management is linked to the group and *vice versa*. Multiple modalities are required because the *Libreria* is a multi-faceted entity, simultaneously a house, shared fertile soil, an enterprise. And, even more so, just as the group is composite so is the approach to management. The importance of heterogeneity as a way of connecting the concrete presence of the group and a productive element in running the bookstore can be

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

further understood by looking at the changes made to the first draft. This text closes differently, its final lines reading: “a mix of feminine attention, farming prudence, entrepreneurial efficiency that we need in order to keep going on and to realise what is good for us [*quello che ci va bene*]”.⁵⁸ This sentence becomes: “a mix of feminine attention, farming prudence, entrepreneurial efficacy. We try to play with this combination of contrasting elements in order to invent and realise something new that might good for women”.⁵⁹

First, “entrepreneurial efficiency” becomes “efficacy” – a slight lexical change that is nonetheless very meaningful in business administration terms, as the latter signals the capacity to reach a goal while the former adds a dimension of performance, signalling the capacity to reach this goal using the least possible resources. I thus read the meaning of this word choice as a way of conveying that the bookstore is able to reach its (political) goals notwithstanding the issue of resources. Secondly, the main version stresses the importance of the mix of elements – care, caution, and strength – and their combination in successfully running the bookstore, while the first draft seems to connect it only to efficiency.

To conclude, there is a shift from a reference scenario associated with the group – the management styles serving to meet their needs – to a generalisation of the scope of the project, aspiring to create something new that benefits all women.

⁵⁸ *Storia della Libreria delle Donne – Prima stesura*, 1979 or 1980, typewritten text, 4 pages, held at ALM at FB, Milan (4.1. B. 33, F. 1).

⁵⁹ *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, conserved at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, 1.5, B. 10, F. 1) and at ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).

The aliveness of the *Libreria* can be seen in the pages of this archival document, evoked in the handwritten comments by the group:

I like it. Elena

Beautiful, and true. Bibi

*We love it. Renata + Giovanna*⁶⁰

8.3. Chapter summary

This chapter constituted a first stepping into the practical activities of *Libreria*, as the chapters 5, 6 and 7 introduced the historical, contextual and theoretical space grounding and characterising it. The chapter unraveled through two main different part. The first part presented how the *Libreria* is organised in terms of activities, membership, typology of work engagement and commercial offer. This part presented also the description of two activities as a way to exemplify the typology and the range of events carried out in the space. The second part of the chapter presented of a key text that constitute an organised reflection and a narrative effort on *Libreria* activities and projects from the perspective of its own members. The analysis of this text allowed me to highlight or to infer some key points of the ideational and political aspects attached to organising.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter 9

The turn of the century: relocating physically and virtually

The previous chapter offered an overview of the *Libreria's* organisational life (8.1) and the members' own narration of it, shedding light on the significance behind its organisational style (8.2). This chapter presents two key – as repeatedly referenced in the interviews – contemporary events, both of which took place in 2001 and had to do with processes of change, the first a physical move from one location to another and the second a 'move online', with the setting up of the *Libreria* website and web presence and their implications. By looking at how these processes unfolded, we can consider how new practices have been constructed as compared to old ones, and why. Section 9.1 presents the distribution of space in the new *Libreria* location following renovation work after the bookstore moved and explores the rationale behind architectural and design choices. Section 9.2 presents the website and its main sections, explaining how ideas are generated and implemented and how the newsroom is managed.

9.1 The physical relocation

The bookstore is currently composed of two adjacent rooms. The first, which has access to the street and a large shop window for the book display, hosts the bookshop proper. On entering, a customer finds a section devoted to Carla and Marta Lonzi's books on her immediate right, between the entrance and shop window, and to her immediate left a selection of Art and Art Critique books. The right wall is devoted to Women's Politics and Philosophy books (including Psychoanalysis, Religion, History, Anthropology, and Lesbianism) while the left houses Fiction (including Crime Novels, and a separate section showcasing *La Tartaruga* publishing house). Right in front of the left wall there is a long table hosting a selection of books, the theme of which changes depending on book presentations or events, and a smaller desk with a computer and a cash register. In front of this there is another shelf containing a selection of the novels most popular among *Libreria* women, basically an Advice/Highlights section. On the wall in front of the door there is Poetry and Miscellaneous (Cuisine, Travel, Children, etc.) while the centre of the room there is a desk with Novelties divided into two sections, Narrative and Essays.

The room is rounded out with a display of silk-screened prints from the 1980 *Cartella delle Artiste* and the 1975 poster celebrating the *Libreria's* opening.¹ This first room has also a loft (*soppalco*) and basement: at the centre of the room, a staircase leads down to a space hosting the archive and up to the administration office. The loft covers the entire length of the library space and is furnished with three desks stacked with paper, binders and folders. At the end of the corridor-like space there is another workstation.

¹ For a discussion of the *Cartella delle Artiste* and opening poster, see Chapter 6.

IMG. 17 - Libreria delle Donne, interiors from the above
My photograph.

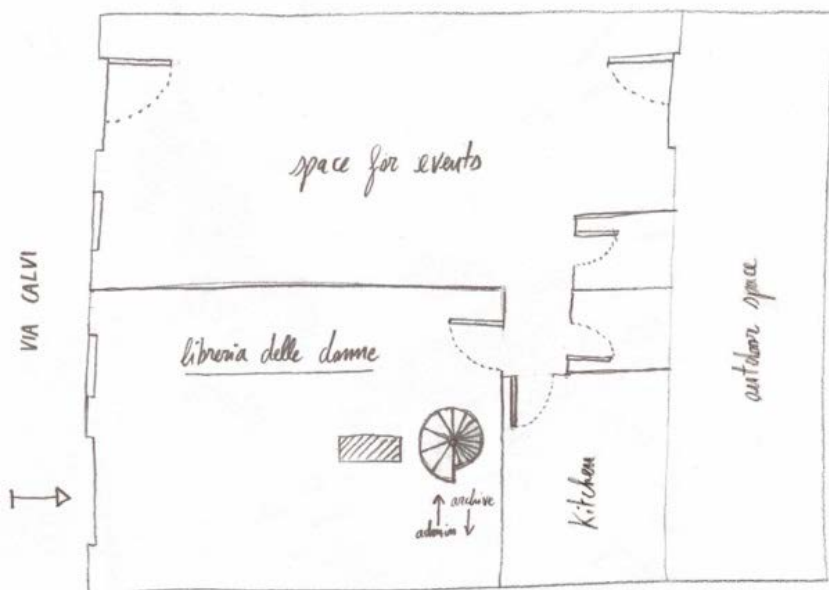


IMG. 18 - View of Libreria delle Donne
Photo from Libreria delle Donne Instagram Account
(@libreria_delle_donne_milano). All rights reserved.



The second room is a relational space dedicated to events and seminars, equipped with tables, chairs and a living room, as well as projection equipment and a sound system for film screenings and book presentations. The shop window devoted to displaying contemporary artwork is located here, and the walls are covered with works of art. Within the second space there is also a kitchen and small courtyard/garden.

IMG. 19 - Libreria space division
Drawing by Mattia Bonanomi



The different spaces thus host different functions (see picture above). This distribution of space reflects conscious decisions made while renovating the space, following the 2001 relocation.

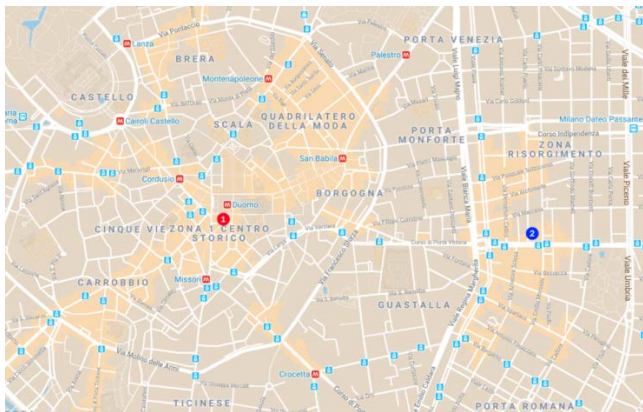
TAB. 9 - Libreria delle Donne space and activities

ROOM, FLOOR	TYPE	ACTIVITY
First room, ground floor	Bookshop	Selling space
First room, upper floor (loft)	Office	Administrative space
First room, lower floor (basement)	Archive	Preservation and documentation space
Second room	Living room	Events and relations

9.1.1 The old spaces

From its establishment in 1975 the *Libreria* was located in Via Dogana 2, a very central site in Milano, less than 200 meters from Duomo Cathedral; in 2001 it then moved to the new site in Via Pietro Calvi.

IMG. 20 - Map of Milan. Via Dogana, the old location of the Bookstore (1) and Via Pietro Calvi (2)
Google Maps, Screenshot



The location, situated on the ground floor with two windows onto the street, rented out by the Municipality of Milan at a “reasonable price”² was not big, but it was “charming [...] beautiful because it was historical, tram passing by in front of it.. but it was really tiny [...] [the bookstore] was beautiful because there was this small space with these shop windows on a city center street and then an underground space”.³

IMG. 21, IMG. 22 (next page) - Views of the premises
of the old bookstore in Via Dogana, Milan
All rights reserved. Courtesy of Libreria delle Donne di Milano.



² *Breve Storia della Libreria*, typewritten text, 4 pages, held at ALD at FB, Milan (Correspondence 1980-1986, B. 10, F. 1).

³ Interview with Stefania Giannotti, 16th March 2018, Milan.



The bookshop section was divided into different areas.⁴ It is interesting to note that the new Pietro Calvi spaces ended up being organised just like the old ones, an upper loft with the administration, a ground level with the bookshop and an underground floor with the archive. The old space is described in the 1980 leaflet celebrating the bookshop's 5 year anniversary:

There is the ground floor bookshop, open to anyone, a loft for the administration and a basement with the archive, journals and books with a space to read them.. in the basement there is also a sort of bar.⁵

⁴ See chap. 6 (section 6.2: The Foundation) regarding the initial set-up of the *Libreria* in 1975.

⁵ *Manifesto di presentazione della Libreria e della sua pratica politica in occasione dei 5 anni dalla nascita*, ALD at FB, Milan, series "Libreria 1980", 1.1. B. 1, F. 9.

The ground floor hosted the bookshop while there was an underground floor used for documentation conservation and where, given the limited space of the bookstore proper, political meetings were held – indeed, references to these meetings were a very recurrent theme during my fieldwork. Frequently referred to as “the bunker” or “smoky basement”, a recurrent trope in my interviews together with references to the Thursday meetings, this basement seems to be a seminal place in the collective memory of the women who spent time at the bookstore. The “meetings underneath” (*riunioni di sotto*), as some women describe them, are recalled as crucial learning moments. For example, Renata says:

On Thursday there were always a group, the Thursday group, and I remember this bookstore’s space, smoky but full of energy, all the women sitting there [...] and if I think about the quality of my listening it was like a nourishment for the mind, something that...and I remember that I started to entrust authority and value to women [*ho incominciato a spostare il riferimento di autorità e di valore verso le donne*].⁶

Indeed, this space hosted the editorial meetings for *Via Dogana*, and some key texts such as the *Sottosopra Verde* (1983) and *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (1987) were drafted there.⁷

It’s incredible how we were able to stay there, and even smoking– because back then we did smoke! – in twenty, thirty, even forty people in a space that was claustrophobic. [...] That,

⁶ Interview with Renata Dionigi, 13th December 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

⁷ See Chiara Martucci’s interview with Luisa Muraro, in Martucci 2008: 94-100.

for me, was a special space, a powerful, speaking feminine internal space, that was calming, and was able to make me overcome my claustrophobia..⁸

IMG. 23 - A meeting in the basement of Via Dogana, from the above
(without date)

All rights reserved. Photo by Maria Grazie Chinese. Courtesy of Libreria delle Donne di Milano.



The move took place following the Municipality's decision to increase the rent that had been negotiated in 1975.⁹ As a national newspaper wrote:

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 95-96

A forced relocation (because of too high rents prices), that nonetheless ignited new enthusiasm, and an even more secure willingness [*con agio ancora maggiore*] to go on with the idea of valorising female writing and knowledge.¹⁰

Recent events show how frequently rent increases and real estate-related problems (difficulty in sustaining rates, acquisition by other institutions, seizures, spatial marginalisation, etc.) can entail a transformation (management changes, governance changes, or, in extreme cases, closure of activities) in historical feminist organisations.¹¹ In this case the Milanese group, according to their self-

⁹ The Mayor at the time was Gabriele Albertini (*Forza Italia*, the right wing party founded in 1994 by Silvio Berlusconi).

¹⁰ Giovanna Pezzuoli, *Il femminismo cambia casa*, «Corriere della Sera», 20 January 2001 (from press review held in the personal archive of Pinuccia Barbieri, a member of the bookstore. Document retrieved on 11 January 2018).

¹¹ Besides historical events connected to this dissertation (for example the historical Parma Women's Library struggled for years to secure a space in the city centre, and the collapse of this project caused the disaggregation of the library's political activities with it closing soon after), I refer here to recent events both national and international concerning historical feminist spaces in relation to urban and real estate policies. In Italy, *Casa Internazionale delle Donne* di Roma (Rome International Women's House), another seminal feminist space opened in 1987 (but with roots in the movement of the Seventies, as its history dates back to 1976 when various Rome-based collectives occupied a very central palace in Rome, *Palazzo Nardini*), is now struggling with evictions. During a brief stint of fieldwork in London in October 2017 I visited some feminist organisations, including the London Women's Library and Archives, that are facing a situation similar to that of the Women's House in Rome. The Fawcett Library in London, a Women's Library connected to First Wave Feminism in London and the oldest women's library in Europe, has now been acquired by the London School of Economics after a long series of moves due to evictions and changes in property ownership. While this gesture saves and

narration as collected in the interviews and confirmed by comments made at the time in press outlets, accepted the forced move with the idea of making the best of it. The newspaper *Il Manifesto* explicitly referred to the relocation as a possible risk for historical institutions, but also as change embraced as an opportunity to relaunch the *Libreria*:

Changing address usually means two things 1) to change position in the street map, 2) to modify direction compared to one's own history. [...] Not for Milan Women's Bookstore relocation. [...] The «forced» choice – municipal rents are rising in the historic center of Milan's (and not only there) – has become a re-launch, leveraging on, now like then, on the political practice of relation among women.¹²

Instead of resisting the change, the group understood that it was important to avoid lodging protests with the Municipality demanding that it be allowed to remain there (as this might have meant asking for an implicit form of support, like a cultural institution rather than a commercial activity) to manage themselves. Indeed, they had in mind the larger stakes involved: the continuity of the *Libreria* and especially its continued operation as an independent project. They were prepared to leave the space but bent on obtaining “more”: if they had to move outside the centre, they would only accept another Municipal-rented space, at a lower rate, and it had to be a shop (i.e. located on the street) and, although not necessarily as central as the Duomo, not located in the city's periphery. This approach was about conducting themselves

preserves the archives, it also entails a risk in terms of accessibility to a broader and more diverse public beyond solely academics, not to mention constituting an example of change in status and governance.

¹² Stefania Giorgi, *Lascia e raddoppia*, «Il Manifesto», 10 March 2001 (from press reviews held at the Pinuccia Barbieri Archive – document retrieved on 11 January 2018).

and their project, as Luisa Muraro explained to me, with “determination and moderation (*grinta e misura*).”¹³

In fact, the *Libreria* asked for individual donations to support the relocation project, sustained in part by the bequest of the late Bibi Tomasi, as reported in the newspaper coverage of the event: “Bookstore and Rose Club are relying exclusively on each women strength of desire, therefore, on self-financing”¹⁴, continues the *Manifesto* article, concluding the article with the cooperative’s bank account information for people to make donations. A bookstore leaflet makes this request explicit, “tailoring it” to the members.¹⁵ Associates’ quotas are needed to cover expenses, but also to create a comfortable and liveable space. The main idea of the leaflet is to donate to the space what they would themselves like to find in the premises, for example design armchairs, a sound system, movie theatre equipment, flower pots, etc. In this idea of donating according to personal tastes we can detect the idea of being responsible and accountable for one’s own desires as a point around which to gather energies and forms of collaboration to fulfil a common goal, an idea that is at the foundations of the way the *Libreria* is run.

9.1.2 The new spaces and their rationale

While the division of space inside the bookstore remained the same, the new *Libreria* is also equipped with a second room that participants can use to carry out the kinds of meetings and events that were confined to the “bunker” in the previous location. I observed that

¹³ Interview with Luisa Muraro, 30th November 2017, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

¹⁴ Stefania Giorgi, *Lascia e raddoppia*, «Il Manifesto», 10th March 2001 (from press reviews held at the Pinuccia Barbieri Archive – document retrieved on 11th January 2018).

¹⁵ Collected thanks to my access to the archive of Pinuccia Barbieri (11 January 2018).

the space has been designed to foster relations among members and between different types of activities. This was particularly evident during my interview with Assunta, as we were having our conversation in the space devoted to administration, located in the loft. While interviewing her about bookshop management, I realised the extent to which I could look down from her working space and take in the life happening below us, in the *Libreria*. Voices, transactions, phone calls and deliveries, all of it can be perceived through the grate in the loft floor that allows voices and images to pass through. Similarly, my meeting with Flora, the bookshop archivist¹⁶, was specular with the one with Assunta: with the latter, I had to climb to the upper part of Libreria, for the first time, having the access granted in virtue of my interview to the “administration”. This time, I had to descend the spiral staircase leading me for the first time to the archive. An elderly, beautiful and absolutely eccentric lady waits me – sporting a fur hat and smoking a cigarette [yes, a cigarette in the premises of a basement, furthermore containing an archive]: here is Flora, historical feminist, macroeconomics teacher, part of the Pedagogy of difference group and responsible for the archive. First, she explained the history of the archive, then she proceeded to show me the precious photographs and then we started our interview. This time, in an upside down experience, I felt the continuous hubbub from up there.

The use of a grate covering the floor of the loft was a conscious design choice made by the architects in charge of equipping the empty space after the 2001 relocation, a choice intended to foster communication and also signal that the women working in administration are indeed women belonging to the *Libreria* collective and not professionals.

¹⁶ I met Flora on the 15th December of 2017 and then we had a follow up conversation by phone on January 2018.

S. The division [of the upper and lower space] is correct because in the same space I could not have granted the privacy to the administration that now is upstairs – what do you do, you position it near the books? Or in another, separated room? No. We made the loft [*soppalco*] because they are.. she is not just an accountant..they are two women of the *Libreria*. And downstairs as well, there are two women of the *Libreria*. [...] It is a space that is divided and yet is a whole. [...] I find that this vertical disposition is correct. Because one level [the horizontal one] maintains the public connections, the other [the vertical one] keeps the connection among librarians, you exit the back door and on the left you have the space for the events [*spazio relazionale*].¹⁷

Stefania is referring to the *Circolo della Rosa* space, adjacent to the *Libreria*, that hosts events and seminars and the kitchen, for associates' use and leisure. Whereas the bookshop is intended to give visibility to women's intellectual production in the literary sphere, the *Circolo della Rosa* space displays women's contribution to the visual arts. The shop window is embellished by the works of the art project *Quarta Vetrina*, while on the walls hang pieces by artists such as Carla Accardi, Valentina Berardinone, Vittoria Chierici, Lisa Ponti and Bibi Tomasi, among others.¹⁸

The idea of a continuity and fluidity is constructed through the architecture of the bookshop premises and is also achieved through other means such as, for example, the way the division between the 'living room' for events and the kitchen was organised.

¹⁷ Interview with Stefania Giannotti, 16th March 2018, Stefania's home, Milan.

¹⁸ They are artists 'friends of' *Libreria*, or that contributed to the creation of *Libreria* thanks to the 1975 private sale (cf. chapter 6); some pieces of *Cartella delle Artiste* are instead displayed in the main space of the bookstore.

The kitchen is ‘run by’ the group *Estia*, named after the goddess of domesticity, that prepares food for the associates’ meetings. The *Estia* group defines its activity as providing “relational cuisine”,¹⁹ an expression used to signal that food should be understood as more than a merely functional means of nourishment. The activity of cooking both with and for others and sharing meals offers participants the chance to relate and be convivial.²⁰ In other words, the group is interested in breaking down the traditional hierarchy between that which nourishes the body – food – and that which nourishes the mind – philosophy. This intention can be seen in the fact that these cooks write and write about what they do, in keeping with the reflexive approach also seen elsewhere in *Libreria* organisation.²¹

Coming out of the kitchen through a small hallway you can go on one way to the bookstore with the loft and on the other in the meeting / living / dining room of the Club. So, it might happen that cooks go from the kitchen to the bookstore, their apron still on, *pardon*, or that a client, coming in to buy the latest literary or political work is hit by a delicious, acrid smell of turnip greens, with the inevitable yelling of the librarian taking the shift “close that door!”

[...] There is circular movement between us, nourishing with food and politics nourishing us. A continuous movement, even physically, with doors opening and closing, someone entering and having a stroll in the kitchen, browsing around, asking for

¹⁹ This expression has also become one of the classification criteria of the book offer.

²⁰ The concept of ‘care’, in its different declinations, is a theme present in feminist reflection, both Italian, cf. Paolozzi 2013, and, most notably, in the American one, cf. Gilligan 1982.

²¹ The writing activity that the group undertook in narrating its own story and meaning is captured in the book *Fuochi, La Cucina di Estia* (Milan, 2014).

an aperitif, a couple of pistachios. “What are you preparing”, someone exits [from the kitchen] “I am going to buy a book” or “I’ll go listen a speech and I’ll come back, stir the sauce.” (Giannotti 2014: 40; 52)

The excerpt above effectively captures this willingness to construct the bookstore as a space that is an *unicum vivibile*²² in which functions and roles are not sharply divided. This is achieved in part thanks to the fact that the architects provided the kitchen with a set of speakers, thus bringing the political discussion taking place outside into the cooking space.

As a matter of fact, the architects, both *Libreria* members, carried out the work of renovating the *Libreria* understanding it as a political process. They were conscious of the fact that they were working not for a client but for a group of people who share a common project.

[...] You could feel it was a political project. It was not like working on a person’s house, trying to make it the best that you can taking in consideration what the client wants and helping her by orienting her to what would be best. [...] Between these two people [client and architect] there is not a common project, well it is a common project but it starts from two different personal stories, the client is someone outside of you [è altro da te]. While in this case the client was not someone outside of you.. and more importantly it was a political project that you completely shared, it was supposed to last forever. Because in our logic feminism and the politics of difference lasts forever.²³

²² Interview with Stefania Giannotti, 16th March 2018, Stefania’s home, Milan.

²³ Interview with Stefania Giannotti, 16th March 2018, Stefania’s home, Milan.

“Feminist politics last forever”, assert the women who set up the *Libreria*. Given their struggle and studies, however, they were well aware of the silencing power of history and indeed the core of their work on female genealogies was devoted to granting visibility to female thought. It is this focus that led the founders to set up the archive from the very beginning, as was clearly expressed during my conversation with Lia Cigarini, one of *Libreria* founders. According to her, the main motivation was to preserve their writings for future generations and collect material for educational reasons in a moment in which numerous teachers and students were working on feminist issues. Lia underlined that everything had to do with their research and political interest in the idea of genealogies, epitomised by the founding of the *Libreria* and their extensive research on writers, research which also drove them to reflect on the necessity of preserving an inheritance to be handed down over time.

Making reference to women writers of the past. Writing has been always important. For communicating, transferring, theory and experience, yes. The narration of the experience to me is already the base of theory. Theory is a practice putted into words, you know, for what concerns women politics. So.. being crossed by genealogy as daughters, before, and as mothers then. That’s why we said, since the very beginning, let’s produce texts but we also have to conserve all the texts we find, the personal archives, everything.²⁴

The archival and documentation materials were moving to Fondazione Elvira Badaracco in Milano, the former *Centro di studi storici sul movimento di liberazione della donna in Italia*, in 1999. Today, the *Libreria*’s

²⁴ 6th December 2017, Lia’s office, Milan.

archive holds its own publications and magazines, photographs, and administrative documents as well as a selection of seminal international books available for study and consultation. The list of these “precious books” was collectively compiled by historical *Libreria* members and a new generation of women taking part in the bookstore activities. The result of this project can be found online.²⁵ In fact, another change also took place in 2001: the *Libreria* ‘moved’ online in February 2001 with the launch of the website www.libreriadelledonne.it.²⁶

9.1.3 The process of designing the new Bookstore

In summary, the rationale behind the renovation work carried out in association with the move focused on:

- Creating relations between the women working in the *Libreria* and women entering the bookshop to buy books. The idea was to create a cosy space, facilitating relation between clients and the *turniste* – volunteers who are booksellers, not shop assistants, underlines architect Stefania Giannotti to stress the difference between big commercial bookshops and the *Libreria*. Indeed, the spaces of the *Libreria* were planned specifically to reinforce this idea: there is no doorbell and the books are not equipped with anti-shoplifting devices.
- Fostering communication between *Libreria* women involved in different activities, signalling a blurred division between work

²⁵ “Questo è un elenco tendenzioso e parziale di libri che ci hanno parlato. La scelta è dettata unicamente dalle nostre preferenze, e dal fatto che dopo ogni lettura ci siamo trovate a guardare la realtà con altri occhi. Sono i nostri testi preziosi a disposizione di tutte/i. Alcuni non sono più sul mercato, ma li potete trovare nel nostro forziere. Altri siamo riuscite ad accumularli come fanno le formiche, e vi aspettano sui nostri scaffali” [<http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/libri-preziosi/> – essed 11-02-2019].

²⁶ Cf. section 9.2.

and political involvement in the *Libreria*. The space was also conceived with the women who inhabit it in mind, recognised not only for their competence in running the *Libreria*, but as political members of it. In this sense, the openness between levels (ground floor with *turniste*, upper floor with administration, and living room with political events) is a deliberate, well-thought-out effect achieved through architectural choices and material devices that enable sound to circulate.

- Thirdly, the process of renovation work itself was carried out as a professional project but with an awareness of the political nature of the project. Therefore the architects, both members of the *Libreria*, operated with their own important stakes in the process and involved the others members of the *Libreria* every step of the way.

9.2 The virtual relocation: the creation of the Bookstore website

In 2000 a group of young women began to work on setting up a website for *Libreria delle Donne*.²⁷ Sara Gandini and Laura Colombo, both with a vivid interest in science and technology²⁸, conceived the idea and a group of young professionals (including scholars in Philosophy and Law, and archivists) who spent time in the *Libreria* began to bring the

²⁷ During my interview with Clara Jourdan, it was revealed that there had been an even earlier attempt to create an online space for *Libreria delle Donne* in the Nineties, led by Enrichetta Susi, a Bologna-based scientist who took part in the *Libreria's* female scientists research group *Ipazia*.

²⁸ The former is a scientist and epidemiologist, at the time active in the first *Reti Civiche* scene in Milano, while Laura is an IT expert, employed at the time at IBM.

project to life²⁹. After one year of development, the website went online in 2001 and was subsequently overhauled in 2013.

It consists of a rich and multi-faceted page displaying both original and historical materials. Besides the obvious information about the book catalogue, offers and new arrivals, the website offers, on a weekly basis:

- texts and reflections by *Libreria* editorial staff, both in a shorter format resembling a journal article (*Contributi* section) and in a longer, essay-type section (*Approfondimenti*);
- a page featuring articles published by other platforms or newspapers (*Dalla stampa* section) with a curated press review surveying various matters that bear on feminist politics;
- a section suggesting national and international events connected to feminism, and giving visibility to other feminist organisations (section *Altri luoghi altri eventi*).

The website also offers other content such as information and supplementary materials about research and collective work conducted by *Libreria*, free access to key historical publications (*Sottosopra*, for example), digitalised and translated into several languages, information on the composition of the documental, iconographic and rare books archive held at the *Libreria*, and information about other Italian feminist groups and collectives who maintain relationships with the *Libreria* group.

9.2.1 Project set-up: inheritance from the past

The project of creating the website represents the first initiative conceived and carried out by a group of women from a younger

²⁹ Francesca De Vecchi, Tiziana Vettor, Laura Milani and Elisabetta Marano.

generation, that is, not by those who actually founded the *Libreria* in the Seventies. The idea for the project originally stemmed from a collective reading and reflection on the 1999 issue of *Via Dogana*, entitled *Le Ereditiere* (“Heiresses”). This number of the journal, devoted entirely to analysing the issue of transmitting feminism heritage from the point of view of a younger generation, ignited a reflection about feminist genealogies, including the most controversial aspects of this issue:³⁰ “In the groups we were reflecting upon what is the inheritance of *Libreria*? To which elements do we want to refer to and what is that we want to relaunch?”³¹ On one hand, the younger women felt gratitude towards the older women who had experienced and contributed to the second wave feminist revolt, and thus wanted to preserve the heritage these elders had produced – exemplified by books, pamphlets, projects, etc. – and to ensure continuity in disseminating *Libreria* thought. On the other

³⁰ *Le Ereditiere*, «Via Dogana. Rivista di Pratica Politica», volume 44/45, September 1999 issue. The issue comprised several articles on the theme of inheritance, and especially of inheriting from a tradition of struggle while the pioneers are still alive, that is to say, while they are still having to construct a path and a political vision (cf. for example the article by Antonia de Vita, *Ereditare in Vita*), but also shedding light on more controversial issues (cf. the article by Francesca De Vecchi, *Molto senso pochi soldi*, criticising the predominant model of feminist political enterprises centred on volunteer-based work). The issue was considered very significant and gave rise to a debate. In fact, it was discussed in a *Via Dogana* supplement, part of the series *Quaderni di Via Dogana*, the text *Un’eredità senza testamento*, which had an international focus (Padoan et al. 2001), and in a seminar series, proposed by the young women of the *Libreria* in 2006 (*Tra il matricidio e il monumento alla madre: la politica delle donne*, focused on mother-daughter genealogies but evidently also touching on the question of potentially receiving an inheritance while “the mothers” themselves are still alive [<http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/oldsite/news/MF.htm> – accessed 11-02-2019]).

³¹ Interview with Sara Gandini and Laura Colombo, the founders of the website, 8th March 2018, *Libreria Delle Donne*, Milan.

hand, however, they also felt the desire to actively contribute with their own project and vision, to enact and create new feminist scenarios.

We started from what we have inherited: *Libreria* as a political project and as precious gift to take care of and preserve. We wanted to make this gift really ours by contaminating it with new practices and new expressive modalities. We saw in the website a possibility to take on this challenge, first of all thanks to the familiarity we have with IT as an instrument, which is embedded in our daily life. So we took the challenge in first person and we tried to mediate with those that were extraneous to this medium. [...] Reflecting on what this inheritance represented to us, we understood that we were interested in opening yet another door, a space open to the other, the external sphere, the unexpected, in the great universe of the web. We wanted to give ourselves the possibility to experiment in the present, and in first person, in order to find a measure that was also ours. (Gandini and Colombo 2009: 171; 175)³²

The website seemed the right medium for granting concrete form to these divergent stances: functioning simultaneously as a digital archive and a device for enlarging the debate to include new generations and audiences, it met the need to preserve, maintain and 'honour' the heritage of the *Libreria*. As an innovative project conceptualised and led by a younger group, it also functioned as a sign of the new generations' willingness and ability to take charge of *Libreria* programming, producing something new and meaningful. However, the process was not carried out without difficulties. It seems that the technological skills held by the young women of the collective played a crucial role, both in ensuring they took on leadership roles and in inducing them to develop

³² The published text is in Spanish. I thank the authors for having shared with me their own original version of the text, in Italian.

compromises with the forms of resistance coming from some members of the Libreria group. These forms of resistance can be characterised as doubts about the kind of debate and political work that can be carried out through a website.³³

But with time the project attracted numerous other women and the current redazione or editorial committee is also composed of some historical bookstore collective members, including among others Luisa Muraro, Clara Jourdan, Traudel Sattler, and Vita Cosentino.

For a person like me the website was very good as a space to communicate, make the *Libreria* known, but they [she is referring to the youngsters] thought that it could also have been a space of political practice in itself, which sounded a bit strange to me. [...] But I liked it, I mean I was happy that they took this initiative, and then also thanks to the contribution of us, the older ones, it was realised. [...] It is an important space, for me it is really very important now. Because we do know that nowadays Internet is fundamental, and so there is a lot of work and effort put into the *Libreria* website. It is not simply a window; it is debated upon, it has become a space, an important facet [*un'espressione*] of *Libreria*.³⁴

³³ There had been difficulties not only between generations but also among members of the younger group. More than half of the younger Libreria women left the space because of conflicts around key political questions, of which the issue of voluntary work was one. For example Philosopher Francesca De Vecchi was already reflecting on these themes in Libreria publications (cf. *supra* n. 32). It would be fruitful and interesting to deepen the research in light of conflicts and discontinuity in the political organising of the bookstore and to follow the traces of the members who exited in order to understand which kind of projects or political proposal they elaborated once leaving the Bookstore.

³⁴ Interview with Clara Jourdan, 12th January 2018, *Libreria delle Donne*, Milan.

The quote above, expressing the position of a longstanding *Libreria* member, shows how initial doubts – the idea that it was “strange” to use the internet to construct political exchange – made way for not only acceptance of the new project but also a true embracing of it, framing it as an important expressive medium for *Libreria* activities.

9.2.3 Reflecting on feminist heritage: project activity cycle, a proposal

As mentioned above, the project started off as way to honour *Libreria* history while at the same time constituting a contemporary activity led by a younger generation. Indeed, the question of transmitting feminist heritage (both abstract and concrete, played out among bookstore members) was not an easy process. The sense of gratitude felt by younger participants was also accompanied by a sense of weight or burden, thereby engendering a sort of immobility, the feeling that it was impossible to act and create new feminist scenarios in view of the difficulty of operating in such a dense historical place populated by strong women who had ‘made history’. At the same time, younger women felt a desire to stand on the ground of such history by contributing to it with new projects (Martucci 2008).

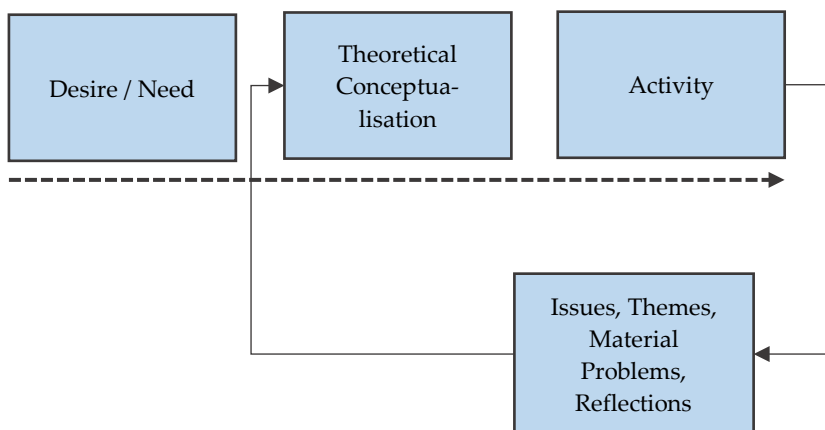
The group felt the need to engage with these issues explicitly and openly, and it thus organised a seminar cycle on the topic in 2006.³⁵ The idea was to reflect upon the practices invented by historical feminists, identifying where these might prove inadequate for the contemporary feminist movement in order to unleash new potential for creating, avoiding the risk of replicating formulas that had already been tested. This shift appears to be particularly significant as it gives a practical example of the theory – practice the group circle. The simplified process could be expressed as follows: around 2000, younger women perceived a problem and felt a desire, comprised within the

³⁵ The seminar was entitled *Tra il matricidio e il monumento alla madre, la politica delle donne*. See also Diotima 2007. Cf. also note 32.

theorisation of feminist genealogies. They developed an activity that constituted active engagement with and a response to the problem: they created the website in 2001. After a couple of years, they returned to considering this issue with another moment of theorisation, symbolised by the 2006 seminar on the genealogical relationship with mothers.

The process is the one of generating activities and projects on the basis of needs and desires and inscribed within a shared theoretical horizon. Conversely, it is exactly the unfolding of the activities and the conflicts or issues that emerged in carrying them out that leads to a second moment of reflection and possible theorisation. This process can be seen not only in the website project, but also in the other *Libreria* endeavours presented in the previous chapters. A possible example of the process might be represented by the figure below.

IMG. 24 - Activity cycle at the Milan Women's Bookstore



9.2.4 Feminist newsroom management: the *Redazione carnale*

There was an idea that the website could be more than a mere communicational and informational device, that it could also be an arena for relaunching and engaging with the political practices of the *Libreria* in a virtual space, and this idea was expressed most clearly in the practices developed for managing the site.³⁶ As Gandini and

³⁶ Narrating the story of the setup of the website and analysing the practices in its management, introduces the theme of relation with technology, social media and the internet at large, which would constitute a new avenue of research. A research devoted to investigating upon the relationship between traditional form of feminist organising (by that I refer to “historical” feminist organisations, started in the 1970s and active today) and new internet-based phenomena would have three main aspects: the relationship with new platforms and social media, the one with internet-based political movements and activism and the third the relation to internet economy. Like many other social movements, feminist groups are increasingly organising and communicating their activities online. This shift, however, might be complex for historical organisations, as it challenges their traditional conception of embodiment and its necessity in transmission of knowledge: the body and bodily relations, central to their theorising and their practicing a transformation of the social world, need to be reconceptualised when the public sphere becomes digitalised. The idea of the “embodied newsroom” is a first example of how the Milan Bookstore is coping and conceptualising these changes, but there is room for other investigations. For example, it could be interesting to investigate the relation of the bookstore with global movements such as the #mee too. The theme concerns contemporary debate and as such is still discussed in the bookstore and worldwide. How is the bookstore relating to the #mee too phenomena? To which extent has it influenced its theorisations and organising practices? Of course, this would require to frame the reception of the phenomena at large in Italy and would need a comparison on how the Bookstore has related to previous global movements. Finally, a future research could be dealing with how the Bookstore is facing with internet economy, for example looking at if and how it is relating to Amazon. This would require to study and analyse how Amazon has been received by the bookstore but also by

Colombo explain, one of the main difficulties in setting up the project had to do with the expressive and communicational medium of the internet: how to render legible complex political thought accustomed to expressing itself in the forms of texts or essays without reducing its depth? The second challenge lays in the disembodied dimension of the web (Gandini e Colombo 2009). The two risks intersected: “The challenge - at the beginning of our enterprise – seemed a very high one because we were adventuring in a world that seems to be characterised by a universal and neutral language and by a disembodied communication.” For this reason, the group decided not only to employ feminist language and methods in writing the articles, but also in keeping up and managing the site. In the weekly meetings, always held in person, the editorial staff discuss everything collectively – no work is to be done in advance –³⁷ in a meeting that ends up taking the form of a political discussion.

The “embodied newsroom” [redazione carnale] of *Liberia* website is the place where we confront with the endeavor of carry on politics in the web without cancelling sexual difference, without cancelling the critical sense necessary when dealing with information that are so fast, and without give up to bodies. The virtual is not enough. We learned from the feminist movement that one’s own body and presence is fundamental to political passion, and the small group practice, or of the rallies is enriched now with the online presence. (Gandini and Colombo 2009)

Once again, the ideas and practices that sustain them mutually reinforce each other in a circular fashion. I asked a member of the

other feminist organisations, using which interpretative frameworks, and what has been its impact towards independent bookstores.

³⁷ Except for preparing a draft for the meeting.

newsroom to describe what a meeting of the newsroom looks like and what it represents:³⁸

On day S., to explain to someone what is that we do, said that choosing the material to be published to update the website weekly is «a bit of an excuse to discuss about politics», and in fact it is. When we are discussing about our own authored website articles or when we are selecting the submitted ones, or when we are sorting out press or web material, we realise that we are doing politics, in the truest sense of the term: what you choose to say and how you choose to say it helps in shedding light on something that is going on in reality to transform it. And this implies many things [...].

It implies choosing how to present things, which also mean to think about the reader, not only in terms of clarity of language, but also in terms of paying attention to what they care about [...].

It implies being able to sustain a conflict without disdain or ridicule for the interlocutor, but trying to ‘shift’ something, to make something happen. To do that, substance weighs more than form and in this case substance is represented by: the thought, the *partire da sé* and the relations (not necessarily in that order), that’s why we don’t need a rigid structure. What is essential is the embodied dialogue, not give in to the temptation of ‘saving time’ by working online, each in front of her own PC screen, each one in her own home. We are convinced that certain things happen in presence, while virtually they can’t. That’s why we called the website newsroom “embodied newsroom”, partly joking, partly seriously.

There is not a newsroom organisational chart and no particular formality is needed to be part of it: the meeting is open, and we published in the website the day and time of the week in which it

³⁸ Email interview with Sivlia Baratella, 26th March 2018 (I conducted a second interview in Milan on 21st April 2018).

takes place, for those who want to participate. There is not a newsroom organisational chart, yet we are not all equal: each one of us according to her passions, and her [political] weight, acquires a role to which the others spontaneously refer to.

This interview extract effectively narrates the dense climate characterising meetings. Having participated in several of them, I gained an understanding of these encounters as true moments of creation and discussion. The need to reach a common decision about what, how and why to publish something represents an occasion to reflect, bringing core political nodes to the fore, beginning either from the thematic or stylistic content of an article or from the position taken by a collective member, etc. The second point addressed in the excerpt is that of roles. Approximately 23 people receive a weekly file with the meeting draft, and around 15 participate regularly in the meeting, 10 of whom are the stable core of the group. Following a pattern that I observed in other aspects of *Libreria* life, there are no formalised roles or responsibilities. Rather, each woman is free to contribute depending on her level of willingness to engage, competences, desires and available time. The last part of the extract is crucial: “there is no organisational structure, but this does not mean we are all equal”. It is not only a question of desire and freedom, there is also the aspect of other women recognising a given participant’s role. Responsibilities are not defined, yet the editorial staff know exactly who is supposed to do what (prepare the meeting draft preparation, edit article drafts, translate, upload materials, carry out technical maintenance, relations with the press, etc.). It is about women taking responsibility themselves rather than having an appointed responsibility. Decisions are made either during collective meetings, or, if it is necessary to decide more quickly, every individual is free to decide and at the same time held accountable for her decisions, usually by consulting with one or more other *Libreria* women. This pattern is repeated for every other aspect of *Libreria* life as well, from running the actual bookstore to organising the cultural events held at the club, etc.

9.3 Chapter summary

The two events presented in this chapter, moving from one location to another and setting up a website, provide practical examples of two crucial points in *Libreria* organising. In fact, they allowed me to underline the centrality of spatiality and materiality in *Libreria* life: the rationale behind the architectural renovation represents a pursuit of shared spaces among bodies busy doing different activities, while the “embodied newsroom”, the name given to the editorial staff who works on the website, is a figure that explicates an understanding of the material presence of bodies in shared space as a constitutive element for enacting feminist politics. The women have articulated ideas about genealogic relations through specific activities: the logic behind establishing an archive relates to the idea of transmitting and preserving heritage while the process leading to the constitution of the website as an activity promoted by the younger *Libreria* generation represents the continuity and aliveness of this same heritage.

PART IV

Analysis and conclusion of the study

Part IV concludes the dissertation by presenting a discussion and a conclusion and summary of the study.

Chapter 10 discusses what are the key dimension in organising observed in the field study and proposes a reading of their interaction in order to explain how processes of immaterial heritage transmission work in the organising sphere. In keeping with the study premises on the importance of organising as crucial to shield, enact, and therefore transmit a particular feminist heritage, this part of the thesis qualifies this process of transmission by understanding its practical workings. The concept of 'material reflexivity' is introduced in order to frame the nature of this practical work.

Chapter 11 goes through the main stages of the dissertation, synthesise its key tenets and expected contributions. It also indicates the thesis shortcomings and limitations and offers reflection on future avenues of research.

Chapter 10

Discussion

The symbolic, the practical and the political aspects are woven together in the organizing processes, they do not exist in three separate domains that occasionally meet.

(Czarniawska 2014a)

The *Libreria delle Donne* is a complex project the political nature of which intersects its cultural and commercial side. There is no substantive clash among its cultural, political and commercial needs; rather, the three dimensions relate to and support one another overall and in practice.

Analytically, the multiple dimension constituting the *Libreria* can be assessed by shifting the focus from an ostensive and reifying definition (Latour 1986; 2005) of the *Libreria* as either a cultural organisation, a political collective or a commercial venue, to instead understand it as an ‘actant’ participating in an ‘action net’ (Czarniawska 2004b) wherein several activities are carried out, including theorising and selling. It was by following both *Libreria* texts and theories (focusing on bibliographic and archival analysis) and practices (through the field study) together that I was able to shed light on organising in the *Libreria*: as Tammar Zilber explains (2002), looking only at structures or practices or only at ideational and meaning-making aspects in organisations might mean that some key features of the organisation being studied go unnoticed.

Practically, the coexistence of different dimensions is made possible by the interpretative, meaning-attribution work carried out by the organisation members: practices in the market and cultural sphere rest upon and are read in light of political meanings. For example, the

Bookstore's collective political objectives are also pursued through its commercial nature, as it is run in accordance with feminist politics and ethics; likewise, the *Libreria's* cultural role – both as distributor and producer of texts – is read as intrinsically political. In her study of a rape crisis centre in Israel, Zilber (2002) looks at the interplay of practices and meanings to show that two different institutions (the feminist and therapeutic ones) were able to coexist in the same organisation, albeit competitively, thanks to the agentic, interpretative work of meaning-attribution enacted by members. I have followed Zilber's framework and suggestion that we examine the interplay of practices and meanings, but while she highlighted how the same rationales of practice can be associated with different meanings according to different institutions, I observed that different practice rationales are read through the same lens of meaning, thus strengthening the dominant (feminist) institution in the organisation. The symbolic institutional work (Zilber 2009) underway at the *Libreria* operates through narrative acts to frame the political dimension as the most significant one. These narrative acts are stories which are both narrated (for example, members' stories collected during interviews, stories circulating in the bookstore that serve as socialisation for new members) and inscribed (Joerges and Czarniawska 1998) in key books, seminal texts, and the website. In this context, the narrative dimension is not just about telling stories about the organisation; rather, stories in this dimension function as meta-organising, as devices as they have the power to organise (Czarniawska 2004a; Czarniawska and Gagliardi 2003).

This work contributes to reframing the history of the *Libreria* as an organisational story. Starting in its project inception phase, members have formulated a vision not only about the bookshop's political and theoretical aims (rediscovering and valorising women's cultural production), but also about the essential element in the collective running of a space, understood as the testing grounds for a political practice based on relationship. The nucleus of political orientation rests precisely on the politics of relationships among women and

participants' understanding of the sphere of practice as the grounds for generating and testing ideas. The genealogical project of rediscovering women's production was important, but also historically embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts and needs. It is instead the continuous challenge of remaining a relevant political collective in contemporary society that renders the *Libreria* a live subject. In fact, in the organisational document *Breve Storia della Libreria* analysed in chapter 8, the narrative seems to suggest that the idea of finding a public space came first, and it was only later that participants conceived of creating the *Libreria*. This reading potentially enriches the conception of *pratica del fare* (cf. chapter 5), casting it as not only the historical moment in which projects of establishing spaces for women and about women's history blossomed, but also as a specific conceptualisation of organisational work. An organisation is understood as the space linking a common project to a practice of relationship among women, understood as the element that gives life to theoretical thought.

In this framework, three dimensions seems to be key in organising the *Libreria*: space, relations, and language. This presentation should synthesise the findings in respect to the research questions and theoretical issues stated in chapter 2. I have shown how the creation phase of this organisation was embedded in a specific socio-cultural context and theoretical milieu. In this chapter I outline the three key elements in feminist organising, namely space, relations and language, that constitute the site where ideas inscribe in the organising sphere theories (Joerges and Czarniawska 1998 Czarniawska 2014a) and allow processes of symbolic institutional maintenance (Zilber 2006). In the second part of the chapter I will qualify how theories and practices interact one another, arguing that this happens thanks to a specific kind of reflexivity. This very kind of reflexivity which I will call material reflexivity functions also as a device able to institutionalise feminist meanings.

This specific use of the past as a methodological grid produces institutional maintenance work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006;

Lawrence et al. 2009) insofar as it reproduces a heritage while at the same time allowing for change and development in contexts such as political movements where being at once rooted in a glorious and legitimising past and capable of responding to contemporary societal developments appears to be crucial. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) have already pointed out that theorising can be seen as institutional creation work; in this case, a methodological kind of theorising is especially functional to such maintenance work

10.1 The three key dimensions of organising

10.1.1 Space

The project could not be understood without its own *space*. The spatial dimension has been granted growing attention in Organisation Studies as part of a broader interest in the entwinement of social and material life in organisational life (Van Marrewijk and Yanow 2010a; Clegg and Kornberger 2006). According to a performative approach to space (Ropo and Höykinpuro 2017), space is understood not only as the physical environment (architecture, objects, space setting) (cf. Elsbach and Pratt 2007) but also as the “active, dynamic and performative force that influences human action” (Ropo and Höykinpuro 2017: 375). For example, building on Henry Lefebvre’s (1991) three-part articulation of space (cognitive, practical, experienced), Taylor and Spicer (2007) advocate for a synthetic framework that is capable of presenting a holistic conception of space. Such a framework would be able to study space as at once physical, experienced and political -by virtue of its serving as the locus of power relations and struggles-: “an integrated theory of space would emphasize the physical manifestations and uses of space, the power relations and dynamics of planning that space, and the way in which actors experience and imagine the space” (Taylor and Spicer 2007: 334). In keeping with this view, Beyes and Steyaert (2011) build on the conceptual shift from “organization to organizing”

(Czarniawska 2014a) to propose that the term 'spacing' be used rather than to 'space' in order to rethink "space as processual and performative, open-ended and multiple, practiced and of the everyday" (Beyes and Steyaert 2011: 47).

The physical space hosting the *Libreria delle Donne* has been conceived as a street level *locale* with the intent of presenting it as public by virtue of its openness to the street and, thus, to everybody who passes by. This public openness was intended to differ from the private dimension of houses as meeting spaces for feminist groups, spaces which reinforced a specific type of attendance: either women who already knew each other or women who already knew the feminist movement. At the same time, in keeping with the 'practice of doing' (cf. chapter 5), the *Libreria* has also been conceived as an alternative to traditional political headquarters, spaces that belonged to nobody, formal and cold: both interviews and documents speak about the idea of instead creating a beautiful and welcoming space. The idea of having a comfortable, beautiful space can also be seen in historical descriptions of *Librairie des Femmes* in Paris, a key reference point and source of inspiration for the Milan Bookstore. Borrowing from Patricia Yancey Martin's (2002) ethnographic study on elderly homes where she distinguishes between "homey" and "institutional" types of facilities, it could be said that the bookstore's physical space was set up to be a "homey" environment in the commercial, public sphere. The internal part of the *Libreria* space was designed to facilitate interactions among members and clients, among members, and among *Libreria* activities as well as to be comfortable and liveable. The space is organised so as to constitute a fluid dimension that allows the multiple activities to relate and influence one another, without hierarchical distinctions among intellectual, practical or 'service' roles. Moreover, the spatial design also leaves room for forms of interference and unplanned encounters, with the architecture making possible interactions between different roles (for example, administrative or librarians) or functions (for example bookselling or cooking). This is a practical example of the constitutive entanglement of the social and material in (organisational)

life, that is to say, their inextricable, interdependent and practice-based relations (Orlikowski 2007). Taking Wanda Orlikowski's argument (2007) further, it could be said that in this case the material sphere, designed to respond to the kind of sociality characterising the *Libreria*, is what contributes to and to some extent enables the performance and production of organisational life.

Such lived and perceived space can also be the object of narrations (Ropo and Höykinpuro 2017; Ropo et al. 2013): this element is particularly frequent in *Libreria*, where participants tell stories about seminal bookstore spaces. One such narrative thread is about "the bunker", narrated as a seminal, womb-like space that hosted key meetings in the past. Narrations also played a key role in the production of the new physical space awaiting the *Libreria* after the 2001 relocation. In fact, physical constraints and conscious architectural decisions ended up generating a space that was virtually identical to the old, seminal space of the first 1970s bookstore (cf. chapter 8). This suggests that spatiality can be produced by planning and imagining (Taylor and Spicer 2007: 335), and that the past – in this case, a past made visible in the physical appearance and symbolic qualities of the enterprise's first location – plays a generative role in determining the present, in this case the organisation of the space.

Space is also the place we inhabit and modify and that modifies or constrains us. It represents a dimension that is co-constitutive of the self, as explained by Schatzki (2001b) in his presentation of phenomenological analyses of human spatiality and Edward Casey's work specifically. The body, continues Schatzki, is the key mediator between space and the self. The bodily occupations and embodied experiences taking place in organisational spaces modify it (Halford 2004) and engage with it through aesthetic (Strati 1999; Halford 2004; Martin 2002) and experiential (Taylor and Spicer 2007) encounters. This becomes particularly significant in feminist organising, where space is crucial in part because it is the *milieu* into which bodies, and bodies in relationship, are welcomed, where such bodies find shelter and

expression and embodied thinking takes place. A “sense of place”, as Hogan (2005) defines it, has been crucial in feminist bookstore organising history, as it has constituted physical and symbolic spaces as platforms on which to exercise political subjectivities.

The title of Virginia Woolf’s formative early feminist essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) inscribes and shields the centrality of the enclosed, symbolic and material dimension of space as a pre-condition for women’s independence. Indeed, it is well worth noting that the first ‘breakthrough’ of Second Wave Feminism, namely consciousness raising, a key practice for the construction of independent subjectivities, was intimately connected to space and neither understandable nor practicable without taking spatiality into consideration. Consciousness raising was connected to a new form of aggregation constituted by private spaces in which women met and talked, in a circle, without a hierarchical structure or formal leadership. The crucial point here is that the first theory/practice (i.e. *autocoscienza*) was already a form of organising (cf. on this also Iannello 1993, Martin 1990). Organisations such as libraries, bookstores, documentation centres, etc. were constituted as deliberate alternatives to the private dimension of the home where consciousness raising was first carried out (cf. chapter 5), as well as the cold and somewhat formal dimension of the headquarters of political organisations or collectives, thus once again underlining the centrality of space in feminist organising. One of the earliest and most well-known feminist bookstores worldwide, founded in 1970 in Oakland, USA,³⁹ was simply called *A Woman’s Place*, and in colloquial feminist jargon women’s centres, libraries, archives, etc. are simply referred to as *i luoghi delle donne*, “women’s spaces”.

The centrality accorded to space is therefore connected to the social and relational dimension that is envisioned and enacted within it. “In what we are there is something that cannot be successfully written, something that cannot be reduced to what can be said with

³⁹ *Amazon* bookstore opened in Minneapolis in 1970 (cf. Hogan 1970).

words, because one needs to be present here, in order to live and experience it. That is why what is written here by us is not enough to convey the richness of what we actually live.”,⁴⁰ states the opening page of the Milan bookstore website, foregrounding the idea that embodied presence – which implies a notion of space as a horizon of possibility for the bodily encounter – is necessary in order to understand the sense of the bookstore. This passage is directly related to the idea that feminist heritage cannot be transmitted only through theories and reading books, an element central to the *Libreria* as section 10.1.3 argues, but also and especially through bodily presence and relational exchange.

10.1.2 Relations

Relations are central for feminist bookstores, as not only are relational exchanges important in these spaces for constructing human and political bonds, but these are also settings in which debates are understood as relational practice (Hogan 2016). Indeed, “practicing conflicts”, an expression used at the *Libreria*, is understood as a testing ground for the construction of independent and autonomous subjects. Relations are central to the Bookstore not only as part of feminist political practice, but also as a crucial organising principle, and relations among members specifically appear to be the key element on which decision-making is carried out in the *Libreria*. This is in keeping with the decision-making processes observed in other empirical studies of non-hierarchical feminist organising (Iannello 1993). Although classic texts on feminist organising held that hierarchical organising was incompatible with feminist ideology (Ferguson 1984),⁴¹ both

⁴⁰ *Libreria delle Donne* website homepage (<http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/> – accessed 10-04-2019).

⁴¹ It should be noted that feminist organisations acquire different features according to the political history in which they are grounded. Studies tend to converge in indicating that liberal feminist organisations have traditional

scholars' and practitioners' accounts revealed that collective-based feminist organising has its shortcomings, mostly related to time-consuming, inefficient decision-making processes, excessive focus on internal processes and negotiations, and implicit, non-formalised yet latent power positions (Freeman 1972; Mansbridge 1973; Iannello 1993; Springer 2005; Mishra and Singh 2007).⁴² These shortcomings suggest that ideals of completely egalitarian and collective decision-making processes are very difficult to achieve in the practice of organisational life (Acker 1995), thus making this type of organising less stable over time (Staggenborg 1995). Therefore, although the main distinction in terms of feminist organisational structure has been the one between

hierarchical and bureaucratic structures while the strands of feminist movement of the seventies that were inspired by other ideologies tended to have, at least at the beginning, leaner, collectivist form of organising (cf. for example Iannello 1993, Ferree 1987, Martin, 1990, Springer 2005). This is similar to the findings outlined in chapter 4 for the Italian feminist landscape, where the New Feminism of the Seventies experimented with collective-based and autonomous forms of organising whereas post-war, emancipationist feminist organisations, connected to political parties, had more traditional structures.

⁴² For a different account cf. Brown 1992 work that constitutes an articulated contribution that, starting from practice, (the fieldwork is conducted two Women's centers in Britain, Greystone Women Center and Whitefield Women Center), avoid polarised positions ideologically either embracing or criticising nonhierarchical structures and looks at the actual processes put in place in context willing to organise without hierarchy. Brown's fieldwork (1992), provided accounts of the meaning of non-hierarchical, consensus base organising in feminist organisations and shows interestingly how this feature allows to carry out feminist ideals in the daily organisational practices. Participation and collective decision making are consistently seen as ways to engage all the members of the organisation and therefore strengthen the group's cohesion, ignite personal and professional growth processes wherein the members acquire autonomy and accountability by learning to take decisions and to dissent critically, and in foster collaboration among functions and therefore sustain the idea of integrated work processes rather than divided hierarchically into different spheres of activities.

hierarchical or bureaucratic as opposed to participatory or collectivist types (Martin 1990), in reality that distinction is not useful in explaining the contemporary feminist organising which mixes elements of both models in its practices and structures (Ferree and Martin 1995).

For example, thanks to her empirical study on three feminist organisations (Feminist Peace Group, Women's Health Collective, and Business Women Group), Iannello (1993) has indicated a new type of decision-making process that would resolve some problems plaguing the collective way of organising without losing sight of its value base, a type she calls "modified consensus". This has three main characteristics: recognition of ability or expertise rather than rank or position, rejection of voting as an element fostering a win-lose ideology (voting is rejected, Iannello explains, as the locus of power dynamics implicit in its operating, while the process of collective decision-making is preferred because it fosters an idea of empowerment through negotiation) and the division between critical (i.e. decisions that might impact the political aims and policies of the organising) and routine decisions; in light of this division, the former are made by the collective as a whole while the latter are delegated horizontally.

My study showed that the *Libreria delle Donne* develops a "dyadic modified consensus" pattern which does reject voting as a decision-making mechanism but does not distinguish between crucial or routine activities, instead defining their importance case by case through an 'on the spot' decision made by two women consulting each other. In fact, as seen throughout the dissertation (cf. especially chapters 8 and 9), *ex ante* dividing activities according to their status, for example intellectual versus practical, would clash with the Bookstore philosophy. Moreover, the profound attention devoted to materiality in the Bookstore gave rise to situations in which even the way cashiers gave change to customers or addressed them were

understood as relevant political issues to be debated.⁴³ The importance of the decision to be made is therefore established contextually, as follows. The decision is made by the person present on the scene of action requiring a decision, and is based on that individual taking responsibility for the decision and on relying on consultation with another, chosen woman. This can be understood as a translation of the theorised practices of 'entrustment' entailing the recognition of disparity among women and requiring positive deferral to the authority of another woman, as well as to oneself, as part of a process of trust in and valorisation of one's own capabilities (cf. chapter 7). Building on artist Alexis Martinis Roe's insight that this political practice implies a critique of horizontal organising and its assumption that all organisational members are equal (Martinis Roe 2018: 57), it can be said that the political practice of *affidamento* has implications for organising. Duality can be understood as the basic decisional unit, one that is flexible in that it changes contextually (referral and trust are different according to the different questions to be resolved) and can therefore adapt to different situations; it is also efficient, as it provides an on-the-spot solution to the organisational problem at hand. The risk of this basic structure lies in the fact that its functioning appears to be directly connected to the stability of the network of relationships and ideas (for example, in this case the idea that there is no hierarchy but neither is there equality) as a whole, and on tacit, collective consensus about who the key actors are when consultation is required. The underlying structure that makes this possible is a constant reference to a shared set of meanings, language and practices, as will be further argued in section 10.2.

The relational dimension in *Libreria* organising is also activated as an affective relationship between organisational members and the overall, broader aim and mission of the place. Following a common

⁴³ Interview with Giordana Masotto, 15th December 2017, Bocconi University, Milan. cf. also Cigarini in Martucci 2008: 85.

pattern in feminist organising, the bookstore operates through voluntary involvement, therefore requiring a material and symbolic act of effort and dedication to a political project. This can be framed as a non-utilitarian and expressive (Gagliardi 2005) gratuitous action in which, instead of formalising roles and responsibilities, each member gives her resources (time, work, writings, etc.) according to her desires, competences, and availability. Rather than receiving a role or responsibility, the subject in her agency autonomously decides to be held accountable for a specific activity. The subject's sense of accountability in relation to feminist ideals is typical of feminist organising (Ferree and Martin 1995; Mansbridge 1995). This means that, even if there are no constraints, things do get done in response to the necessities of the organisation. This trait can be seen, for example, in the way activities are managed in the *Libreria* (cf. chapter 9): implicitly, it is the person who has the desire to organise something who is also responsible for carrying out the project in its entirety. This is a further practical representation of the concept according to which mind and body, practice and theory, should not be separated, and of the active use of emotions, passion and desire in organising (cf. Gagliardi 2007). The affective dimension is crucial in social movement and specifically feminist organising, where emotions are a political tool insofar as, for example, protest and activities have an affective dimension and emotions often underlie people's motivations for joining feminist organisations (Morgen 1995; Taylor 1995).

10.1.3 Language

The affective dimension or centrality of feelings as a starting point for cognitive and political gains has been a key element in the seminal practice of consciousness raising, a fact which also explains why the language sphere has been so contextually and historically important in *Libreria* organising. In fact, *autocoscienza* hinged largely on the political and transformative power of language (cf. chapter 5 for an analysis of the meaning of this practice), as it entailed a *presa di parola* (Dominijanni 2010: 171) leading to cognitive liberation (Springer 2005: 46) that helped

in constituting a common political consciousness among women. At the same time, it also allowed women to grant importance to their own experiences and trained them to do so and to use a specific language (embodied, contextual and relational) caught up in the tension of listening to these experiences in order to render them thinkable and sayable. In other words, practicing *autocoscienza* also had methodological, epistemological and linguistic implications (cf. Muraro 1996). The *Libreria delle Donne*, as a feminist organisation born in the second half of the Seventies after the development of feminist theories and agenda, is historically linked to the centrality of language as the primary means of accessing both political and existential transformation. Mary Fainsod Katzenstein (1995) uses the term “discursive organising” to frame the way feminist organisations leverage the discursive politics learnt in feminist consciousness-raising groups. Discursive politics is, according to Katzenstein, a politics of meaning-making in which organisation members use words carefully, understanding them as simultaneously expressive devices connected to the formulation of new vocabularies for giving voice to women’s experience, and also instrumental ones used to re-frame and produce new meanings in society, following the assumption that “conceptual changes directly bear on material ones” (Katzenstein 1995: 35).⁴⁴

This intimate connection to language is further developed insofar as the *Libreria* is a specific kind of feminist organisation: a bookstore. “We want to bring together, in the same place, the creative expression of some women with the will to liberate all women” wrote the collective in 1975, indicating the possibility of a space that meets

⁴⁴ Katzenstein’s argument does have one main weakness, however: it implicitly sets discursive politics and juridical and institutional policies in a polarised continuum, and she seems to maintain that discursive politics is put in place by groups when juridical actions and influence in society have not yet been achieved. This vision not only underestimates the work of meaning-making in constructing society itself, but also clashes with the specificities of the analysis of Italian feminist thought as proposed in this text.

both expressive and political objectives.⁴⁵ If, as we have seen, the physical and symbolic dimensions of space and relationships are crucial in enabling this to happen, the discursive dimension is the real space in which this objective is achieved. The centrality of language manifests in text (texts displayed and sold, texts produced by *Libreria* members) and in the speech and conversations circulating in the *Libreria*.

Firstly, as noted in chapter 7, specifically 7.4, theorising is conceptualised as finding a name for practices that did not have names because they were innovative and based on a subjectivity that was undergoing formation (cf. Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990). At the same time, this study also indicates that, in this context, practices – or, more broadly, meaningful events in organisational life – seem to constitute a way of practicing language, of becoming better acquainted with words.

Secondly, the textual dimension clearly manifests in the *Libreria's* editorial production, but it can also be seen in the concrete object of its work: books. Books that are written, chosen, displayed, sold, analysed and commented on during public events. The mission of the *Libreria* itself, in its daily work of researching, advocating for and carving out commercial space for women's words and cultural production, is a materialisation of the importance accorded to the sphere of language. For example, Kristen Hogan in her study (2016) focuses on the work of creating a feminist bookstore catalogue, arguing that this labour is a feminist practice in and of itself which she names "the feminist shelf", an expression referring to the work of researching, anthologising, labelling, and showing a textual heritage that serves to categorise information while at the same time granting visibility to a

⁴⁵ Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, *Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne*, 1975, ALD at FB, Milan, section "Manifesti", 1.3. B. 1. F1

field of knowledge. Browsing texts in the relational spaces of a feminist bookstore, Hogan argues, is both a political and an existential search. In fact, the personal transformation associated with reading feminist texts is an experience Hogan underlines and which constituted a recurrent phrase in my fieldwork as well.

The discursive dimension is therefore central to the *Libreria*, a dimension represented not only by the theoretical language or formulations that can be grasped by an ‘external’ reader of *Libreria* publications, but also by the very language found in its internal documents (diaries, letters, other unpublished texts) or daily speech. The speech and utterances circulating in the bookstore during the unfolding of daily organisational life, at political meetings or debates, or in moments of collective thinking are also important elements in the way language is used at the *Libreria*. My analysis of the internal jargon of this organisation (cf. chapter 3) found that language is used as a signal and reference to either key moments in feminist history or in the history of the organisation, or to theories and books produced by either the Movement or the Bookstore itself. The type of language circulating in the bookstore therefore functions, on one hand, as a sign of belonging to the bookstore and, on the other hand, as a way to enact and perform the main tenets of the theories being produced. Theories – especially those developed by *Libreria* members – are indeed present and active in *Libreria* life, and they inspire and guide the day-to-day activities and projects of the *Libreria*. To paraphrase Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), the process of translating theories into organisational practices and conversations is not so much about *disembodying and re-embedding* an idea into the overall framework of the translation as it is about *disembodying and re-embedding* these ideas, as they are never conceived as abstract or individual.

In this sense, language is a force that is both organising and performative. Making reference to key texts, expression usages or ideas stemming from the history and theories produced by the *Libreria* contributes to the work of contextualising (Nörbäck et al. 2014),

establishing the ideological boundaries of the organisation as well as identifying affiliations and membership; through dialogue and exchange, moreover, it ultimately contributes to creating and maintaining the organisational fabric. At the same time, this referential use constitutes a way of performing these theories in the daily unfolding of organisational life.

10.2 Material reflexivity

Spatiality, relationality and language operate and interact with one another in order to ground processes of relational and embedded heritage transmission, to allow the production and consumption of language in a collective and shared way, and to inscribe and materialise the effects of collective thinking. The type of materialisation in question is dynamic, continuously solicited, re-considered, and re-visited. In this process, the key mediator between the two cardinal elements of practice and theory, of experience and language, appears to be reflection.

A type of reflexivity can be seen in *Libreria* organising that could be referred to as “material reflexivity”, a liminal, practice-based, relational and recursive process of generative exchange between theorising and acting that becomes the key processual methodology allowing participants to reproduce the organisation and its institution, feminism.

The practice of doing can be seen as conspicuous example of this process of material reflexivity. Practices, especially when they are new and innovative, require naming and theorisation in order to be effectively disseminated and transmitted (Strang and Meyer 1993): the moment of theorising and formalising the process of “material reflexivity” can be associated with the process of formulating the ‘practice of doing’, beginning in the second half of the Seventies and culminating in 1976 (cf. chapter 5). This Italian feminist expression has

historically referred to feminist groups' increasing interest in setting up activities such as publishing houses, documentation centres, bookshops, and libraries; as such, it indicates the theoretical (naming what one is doing) and reflexive (doing something while being aware of its meaning and implications) dimensions of practice. In other words, the 'practice of doing' constituted a discursive formulation about practice itself that was mainly methodological in nature. The expression therefore also constitutes a critique of the dichotomy between intellectual and material work, representing the "bordering between intellectuality and concrete life"⁴⁶ that has been a founding principle of the *Libreria delle Donne*. Episodes such as the closing of the first *Via Dogana* publication (cf. chapter 7), generating the idea for the *Yellow Catalogue* as resting on the practices that emerged in the *Green Catalogue* project (chapter 7), and the process of creating the website (cf. chapter 9) further exemplify this reflexive pattern in organisational life.

According to Brown (1992), reflexive accounts in feminist movements can be read as signals of the crucial understanding of organising as belonging to the political sphere, and therefore processes, actions and decisions are subject to "critical appraisal and scrutiny" (Brown 1992: 9) devoted to monitor the workflow and oversee the relation between ideals and practical realisation of it. This is confirmed looking at the nature reflexive process observed in *Libreria*. The unravelling of such process can be framed as a type of practical, organisational reflection, characterised by being a social and productive process, as "stepping back" in reflection about actions can provide the base for future ones (Raelin 2001). More specifically, since this process is not only cognitive but also entails dialogical and relational activity, "material reflexivity" is a type of "practical reflexivity" (Cunliffe 2002;

⁴⁶ Lia Cigarini and Luisa Muraro in the interview by Giovanna Pezzuoli. "Il femminismo cambia casa. Il nuovo, ampio spazio di Via Calvi ospiterà anche il Circolo della Rosa." Giovanna Pezzuoli, *Corriere della Sera*, Mercoledì 10 gennaio 2001.

Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith 2004). In keeping with the feature of practical reflexivity that can take place not only after, but also before (i.e. anticipatory reflection Raelin 2001) and even during actions (i.e. reflection in action, Yanow and Tsoukas 2009),⁴⁷ material reflexivity at the bookstore take form as *ex ante* reflexive planning and debate, evaluating action *vis-à-vis* a specific reference framework, ongoing, real-time pondering, and ex post reflexive accounts.

This process has been observed particularly during moment of meanings attribution (for example new meanings generation, as when restructuring the space or setting up the website – but also observable in the process of selecting and approving articles in the website newsroom), where there is a recursive process of referring back to the reference framework represented by the past, mobilised so as to set the stage for meaningful future actions (Raviola and Nörbäck 2013). In this process of referral and practical implementation, time is materialised (De Vaujany et al. 2014a; Yates 2014). For example, Wanda Orlikowski and Joanne Yates (2002)⁴⁸ have articulated the idea of ‘temporal structuring’ in organisations, a process through which temporal structures are produced and re-produced by organisational members who enact them in order “to guide, orient and coordinate their ongoing activities” (Orlikowski and Yates 2002: 684). The *Libreria delle Donne* case illustrates how time is enacted in practice and how organisational actors use the past to produce the organisational present (Whadwani et al. 2018). The case enriches these ideas by also showing that past can be mobilised in practice by referring to it not only as a time-bound historical moment (in this case, for example, a mythical past covering

⁴⁷ Reflection in action implies being immersed in the unfolding of processes and requires practitioners to focus their attention on scenes of action; it also involves developing assumptions and quick responses to “real time” happenings and surprises (Yanow and Tsoukas 2009: 1355).

⁴⁸ Building on social practice theories (Schatzki et al. 2001) and drawing on Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration,

the origins of feminism) or as the expression of specific theoretical tenets, but also as a methodology: the past is what has been done and learnt up to now in the organisation. In fact, history is mobilised insofar it represents on the one hand the insights that have been generated through practical learning, and the methodological gains gleaned from feminist practices invented and disseminated in the Seventies. By making implicit reference to the origins of Second Wave Feminism, the methodological grid serves also to instantiate, express and reproduce feminism.

In synthesis, activities and projects in material reflexivity are inscribed within a shared methodological horizon; an effort of reflexive monitoring constantly analyses how projects are unfolding, leading to two types of outcomes: new projecting (the modification, suspension, or generation of new actions) and new theorising (relational, practical and embodied ideational material is extracted). Such reflexive practice implies a two-directional process of translation (Czarniwska 2000, quoted in Lindbergh and Czarniawska 2006) between the material and the discursive, and the reference to materiality stresses the fact that reflexivity represents not only a process stemming from concrete practices but also the starting point of such practices.

Material reflexivity constitutes a background continuum, a methodological assumption that grounds the actions enacted in the organisation. In this sense, material reflexivity is not only reflection *in* and *on* action, but also *before* action. Since it happens before, during and after action, it is embedded in organisational life: in this case reflection appears to be not a reflexive practice to be activated on demand but rather the cardinal organising practice that orders, guides and makes sense of life in the organisation.

This has two main implications. First, material reflexivity indicates a type of organising. Secondly, since the methodological element is the main feature of the feminism produced at the *Libreria*, it constitutes the very way feminism is framed and reproduced. In fact, my field research clarified the fact that feminism is constructed and

mobilised as a method in the daily practices of the bookstore's organisational life. This is consistent with the analysis of both key historical practices such as consciousness raising and the practice of doing (cf. chapter 5) and *Libreria* theorising activity (cf. chapter 7), thus illustrating key passages showing how this current of feminism has developed an anti-ideological stance.

As practices are a site of knowledge generation and the type of knowledge that is generated through them is both tacit and explicit, and weaves together individual and collective processes (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016), material reflexivity as a methodological practice produces organisational learning, in this case about feminism, that is socialised and situated (Gherardi 2000). It is also sensible (Strati 2007) by virtue of its being materially bound, closely related to the space in which bodily, relational, and affective encounters take place. As a matter of fact, Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004) argue that practical reflexivity as a dialogical practice implying reciprocity and shared agency between members, leads to and entails experiential learning in which *know how* and *know how to be* are entwined (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith 2004: 37). It thus creates a community of practice (Nicolini 2012; Wenger 1998). As such, it constitutes a key means of both framing and transmitting feminism: the way in which feminism is experienced and learnt as if it were a craft. Time, involvement, practice, understanding, and the presence of teachers are all required to learn a craft. Moreover, (human and non-human) materiality is needed to practice and transmit it. For the practice of feminism, the definition of tacit learning proposed by Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) seems to be particularly apt: "Such knowledge is acquired through active engagement in and with the practice world, not through thought alone" (1349).

Since the methodological framework consists in a form of relational thinking-doing, it engenders a texture of activations in organisational life that are generated in practice, providing not content but orientation. This specific use of the past as a methodological grid

produces institutional maintenance work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Lawrence et al. 2009) insofar as it reproduces a heritage while at the same time allowing for change and development in contexts such as political movements where being at once rooted in a glorious and legitimising past and capable of responding to contemporary societal developments appears to be crucial. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) have already pointed out that theorising can be seen as institutional creation work; in this case, a methodological kind of theorising is especially functional to such maintenance work.

The material reflexivity that is mobilised as tool for producing the new constitutes the key legacy of organising under the ideas of Feminism of Difference. It also serves as a matrix for organising and transmitting thought that is configured not in terms of structural qualities rather than content. In this way, the *Libreria delle Donne* is at once preserving, reproducing and transmitting feminism.

10.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter, after underlining how the *practice of doing* can be influential in indicating a type of organisational work, three key dimension in organising in the context of a feminist bookstore, namely space, relations and language, have been described and outlined. The three dimensions form the way in which organisational meanings, decision-making (*dyadic modified consensus*) and socialisation are produced. Their interaction is structured according to a process of *material reflexivity* that enacts generation of new aspects in organisational life and allows heritage transmission. In synthesis, space, relations and language are the dimensions while reflection is the process enacting the relation between theories and practices. Material reflexivity qualifies how theories and practices interact. Moreover, it explains how feminism is reproduced and transmitted in organising:

reference to a shared methodology produces institutional maintenance work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Lawrence et al. 2009).

Chapter 11

Conclusion

A possible way to go through the main tenets of the thesis in this concluding phase, is starting to analyse its title, “A legacy without a will. Feminist Organising as a transformative Practice”, as the expression captures both the origin and the general meaning of the study. The title is composed of two main parts.

The first sentence, which is a reference to feminist texts quoting Hannah Arendt and René Char (cf. chapter 1, note 3), summons right away the question of heritage transmission in the context of feminism, which has been a crucial concern in the development of this thesis research questions. What does it mean inheriting without a testament, a will? What kind of heritage, what kind of tradition takes form in contexts of transmission without a testament?

The absence of a will represents the absence of a solid past to which to refer to, a condition impacting the possibility of continuity in relation with younger generations. Historian Anna Rossi Doria writes that saying inheritance means saying ancestors, patrimony, and testament. Three things that women have to actively search for and reconstruct in order to have a History (Rossi Doria 2007b). The absence of a testament speaks also about an absence in the realm of words. Something happened and existed in reality, but it lacks a formalisation, a description, an inscription in history. In analysing the expression by Char indeed Arendt poses her attention to the absence of name.

“[...] it is in the namelessness of the lost treasure to which the poet alludes when he says that our inheritance was left us by no testament. The testament, telling the heir what will rightfully be his, wills past possession for a future. Without testament, or, to resolve the metaphor, without tradition – which selects and names, which hands down

and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is – there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creature in it. (Arendt 2006 [1961]: 5)¹

Absence of testament is thus a figure for absence of tradition, and in this sense the ascending movement towards history that is represented by the idea and processes of genealogy (on this, cf. chapter 7) is an alternative way to relate towards the past.

The absence of testament also qualifies a process of transmission in a context of co-existence of generations: inheriting without a will means, concretely, that who is passing down the inheritance is still alive (Padoan et al. 2002). Therefore, this expression also refers to processes of memory transmission that have to take care of the role of the alive subjects, of processes of transmission, and of interpretation, by younger generations cohabiting the space of contemporaneity with older ones. The absence of a death further can be used to refer to the necessity of embodied relations and heritage transmission mechanisms in the context of feminism as a practice.

The second part of the title is “Feminist organising as transformative practice”. The expression feminist organising allows to clarify synthetically the theoretical foundation of the dissertation in studying and writing about organisations (referring to practice-based, processual and material understanding of organisational research) and to make explicit the appraisal of feminism as practice (referring to feminist organising stresses the fact that practices cease to exist without forms of agency busy performing them). Indeed, the expression transformative practice, that highlights again the centrality of the dimension of

¹ The notion of tradition is far more complex than this in Hannah Arendt thought.

practice in this study, is a reference to the phrase “A necessary personal transformation is co-substantial with a possible societal transformation.”² The expression, dating 1976, qualifies a central feature of the concept of practice of doing (cf. chapter 5) that reads organising as a crucial dimension fostering processes of personal and societal change.

11.1 Summarising

This text has been an exploration of the interweaving of theories and practices in feminist organising. The study has looked at the type of material and discursive work sustaining such a process as a way to understand the work underlying both the creation and maintenance of an organisation. It has tried to capture this dynamic relationship between theory and practice both in the moment of its inception, by taking into consideration the role of socio-cultural and historical dynamics in the creation phase of an organisation, and in its concrete unfolding, by taking into consideration practices, actions and relations as they were happening. It focused on an Italian feminist bookstore (the Milan Women’s Bookstore) in that an organisation connected to a feminist tradition appeared to be particularly apt for inquiring into the relationship between organising and theorising practices. The first of its kind in Italy, this organisation was set up in the second half of the Seventies. As such, it emerged in a moment in which Second Wave Feminism theorisations and political movements were flourishing and is still open and politically active nowadays. The bookstore also constitutes a centre for formulating and developing feminist theories,

² Leaflet *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*, 1976, consulted at ALM at FB, Milan (3.1. B. 20, F. 8) and ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 20, F. 8). The text will be published in Sottosopra (1976a).

thus providing a window onto an organisation as a producer of discursive formulations.

The research questions at the base of the study revolved around the relationship between philosophical and political theories and practices in the concrete dimension of the day-to-day life of an organisation. The thesis asked what the processes leading to the creation and development of this organisation have been on both organisational and historical levels. Through what practices did the organisation evolve? How have such practices been conceptualised in relation to feminist theorisation? The result is an exploration in feminist organising (Acker 1995), a description of the concrete mediation work taking place between theories and practices in the organising sphere and a reflection on organising as a way to shield, enact, and therefore transmit a particular heritage.

This study dealt with the above guiding questions by combining fieldwork with archival research covering more than thirty years of organisational life; in fact, this research reconstructs the history, context of reference and theories produced by the Bookstore while also observing and participating in the unfolding of its day-to-day activities. The study thus mixes practice-based (Nicolini 2012; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2016) and historical perspectives (Wadhwani et al. 2018; Clark and Rowlinson 2004; Üsdiken and Kieser 2004) in studying organising.

This dissertation is therefore composed of different elements (historical investigation, theoretical reflection, engagement in fieldwork) and, although the narration of the case study is the cornerstone of the written text, in the set-up and development of the thesis I consider the methodological orientation as the foundational element. In embracing a processual and performative view of organising and a practice-based way of studying it, I wished to stress the importance of involvement – both intellectual and emotional – with the field material as a heuristic tool. Engagement with the organisation (for example, with its history and symbolic production) can be framed

as a way of seeing: organisations speak and act by themselves if we are willing to look at and listen to them. Following the path blazed by others before me, I have written a story about an organisation and about this research process in an attempt to learn something from it.

Concretely, the thesis encompasses four main blocks. The first is an introductory part, presenting the study premises (chap. 1), its theoretical (chap. 2) and methodological (chap. 3) framework. The second part of the thesis consists in a reconstruction of the context in which the research object, the bookstore and its feminist practices, emerged. Specifically, this part narrates the early phases of the Italian feminist movement (chap. 4) before engaging with the central concept of 'practice' in the Italian feminist tradition and focusing on the presentation and exemplification of an organising practice, the 'practice of doing' (chap. 5). The last chapter of this part uses archival sources to reconstruct the very early stages of conceptualisation of the project of a feminist bookstore, thus constituting an exploration of the inception phase of an organisation closely connected to a specific political and theoretical *milieu* (chap. 6). Part III of the thesis analyses the bookstore in terms of its ideational (chap. 7) and organisational aspects. After providing an overview of the bookstore management and activities (chap. 8), it then focuses on two more recent events, both of which occurred at the turn of the century, in 2001, and which comprised changes. The first narrates the relocation of the bookstore from its old premises to a new space and the second the bookstore's first 'encounter' with technology, namely creating its website. These two events have been employed narratively to emphasize some crucial point in patterns of membership and decision-making while also underlining the central role of spatiality in feminist organising and the conceptualisation of the importance of bodily relationships in the context of a digital shift (chap. 9). This third part relied not only on interviews and iconographic material but also the analysis of an unreleased archival document featuring a self-narration by the collective of its own organisational history. Finally, Part IV ends the

thesis by presenting the study discussion (chap. 10) and then its conclusion (chap. 11, this chapter).

11.2 Narrating practices of feminist organising

Overall, the text that takes shape through the chapters outlined above consists in a contextualised narration of the becoming of an organisation in an environment characterised by intense philosophical and political debates. It was observed that the recursive interaction between theories and practices translates and materialises in organising through the mediation of language and symbolic production as well as spatiality as concrete and finite space-time for bodies, and through relational exchanges. The way in which this mediation process is carried out has been defined as ‘material reflexivity’. Calling it a ‘way’ stresses its main feature: it has no content of its own, instead referring to the overarching structure keeping the institution (the organisation and feminism itself) together. In other words, it is a method. It indicates the collective reflexive process through which participants appraise spatial, relational and discursive practices in creating the organisation. Organising has been seen as intimately connected to political theory, as the research found in the historical investigation of the environment where the organisation stemmed from (for example in chapter 4, in the narration of *Rivolta Femminile Publishing House* and in the *Sottosopra Journal* example in chapter 5) and theories were always conceptualised as thoroughly intertwined with material life. This emerged clearly in the analysis of the concept of practice of doing in chapter 5. Coming from this environment, the bookstore kept with these principles from the very first stages of organisational life. Every event can become meaningful as a base for theory-making because the community involved in this process is always, to some extent, carefully observing and translating it into words (i.e. naming and labelling new events, creating texts and documents, etc). Once a set of key theoretical constructs have been formed (cf. chap. 7), the organisation is also

endowed with a shared vocabulary that is employed in the daily routine.

Practices, together with form and content, their configuration and interpretation, have been defined as kinds of cultural manifestations (Martin 1992: 37) that are relevant for the life of the organisation. The elements examined in this thesis, such as formal and informal practices, organisational stories, jargon, physical arrangement and content themes, are key aspects investigated by organisational culture research, according to Joanne Martin (Martin 2002: 64-92). Indeed, this research could be re-framed as an inquiry into the ideational, material and political elements involved in the formation of organisational culture, strengthened by the employment of historical research with the capacity to shed light on the socio-cultural and contextual factors shaping organisational culture.³

Moreover, considering culture not as a static property of the organisation but as a dynamic way of thinking and doing (Van Maanen and Barley 1984: 307), the concept of material reflexivity could be useful in inquiring into the way this dynamic operates, especially in contexts in which culture and symbolic production are central to the

³ The study was keen on inquiring upon processes of organising (“how we do things in here”) more than processes of identification (“who we are”). Together with a more explicit reference to historical and contextual processes embedded in the term, this is the main reason why I preferred to refer here to organisational culture instead of identity. However, evidently, elements of organisational identity emerged in the process of research. For example, the interest in analysing speeches, in capturing stories, member’s narrations and even theoretical constructs, that were aimed at understanding processes of institutionalisation, can also be seen as part of identity work (McInnes and Corlett 2012) obtained in everyday interactions and through narrative constructions. Yet, it is important to set the boundary between what constitutes identity work and what falls in the category of identification with organisational values or norms (Alvesson et al. 2015); how to operationalise in concrete field work terms this difference is unclear to me.

organisation under scrutiny. In addition, following the idea that culture is not just a mere variable in organisational life but that organisations are themselves cultures (Smircich 1983; Meyerson and Martin 1987), the idea of material reflexivity can be seen as an attempt to analyse how organisation relates to and potentially reproduces itself and, therefore, its culture. The reflexive element embodied in organisation members, in fact, represents the possibility of possessing a memory and sense of past to attach to processes of sense making. The expression therefore also indicates the continuous and conscious awareness that organisational members are doing and re-doing the institution at any moment. Material reflexivity thus introduces a dynamic element in the process between theories and practices and their symbolic or spatial figuration: otherwise, we would be observing only a back-and-forth movement. In other words, material reflexivity also allows us to recognise development in organising.

Development is particularly relevant in this research context. In fact, this dissertation set off from a reflection on processes of heritage transmission in the case of feminism as a practice. This practice always necessarily begins from an engagement with, and is devoted to changing, reality; it is always necessarily close to the living beings who are busy doing it. Therefore, it requires a shared political horizon, embodiment and relational exchange to be transmitted. Given these points, this thesis grew out of the initial observation that feminist organisations constitute an important site in which this embodied, relational and transformational heritage can be effectively preserved and transmitted. The concept of material reflexivity seeks to qualify this process of transmission. It is not in the organisation as fixed entity but in the open process of organising that the material, relational and symbolic space opens channels for feminism as a practice to be transmitted in a dynamic, anti-ideological way. In fact, such a devotion to organising allows feminism to be practiced contextually, negotiated each time among the members and calibrated to the situation of the moment, thus dodging the risk of ideological, and therefore fixed and sterile, repetition. In other words, it would seem that feminism as a

practice is transmitted in the context of organising through a reference to a shared framework, a framework which is methodological in nature. Referring to a common matrix of sense-making, a structure without content, in the finite context of the space-time of the organisation is a way to ensure that the protection of a shared past and an openness to the new and unexpected are possible in the same moment. Organising thus assumes a crucial role, enacting the political and relational dimension that is embedded in the notion of 'practice'. Evidently, comparative research is needed to investigate the extent to which this process has also been developing in other types of feminist organising (for example, health centres) or in organisations stemming from different traditions of feminist theory.

Practice is a central element in feminist intellectual tradition. In addition to the precious and critical tools formulated by feminism that make it possible to formulate analyses of gender as a social practice and appraise their meanings in work settings, feminism must be considered an influential intellectual tradition in theories of practice, given its broad epistemological tenets. The nature of this influence, its relationship with other currents of thought and the specificities of its contribution deserve further study. Hopefully, this text shows how central the concept of 'practice' has been to a specific tradition of feminism thinking, Italian Feminism of Sexual Difference, and which elements can be derived from it. This dissertation (see, for instance, chap. 5) tries to synthesise the features and implications of the concept of 'practice' in Italian feminist tradition. Practices in this tradition are composed by relational, political, linguistic and epistemic aspects. They can be defined as figurations of the desired new social order, figurations constituted by ideational, symbolic and material arrangements organised in relational settings. Their horizon is therefore always a political one. Practices are generative and testing grounds for theories and arenas for observing the limits and possibilities of language. Historically, in fact, practices have also been sites for *practicing language* by eliciting new forms of narration and by allowing

unexpected content and modalities to enter into the sphere of the 'sayable' and of the political.

Moreover, this thesis has offered an example of practice, the *pratica del fare*, which refers specifically to the organising sphere. The *pratica del fare* refers to overcoming the division between intellectual and material work, a conceptualisation of organising as the grounds for simultaneously generating political projects and reflexive theory: "doing, and all it brought to life, should be open to reflection so as to transform experience into knowledge" (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 81-2). Furthermore the "doing" is understood also as a way to activate processes of personal transformation, understood as *co-substantial with* processes of social transformation⁴. Embracing a feminist view of practice entails a political perspective on the process of organising as a site for imaging future scenarios for reality while practicing relational exchanges and language.

11.3 Moving forward

The study has many limitations and could be developed in multiple directions, in the future. The story privileges continuity over discontinuity, thus inevitably losing focus on conflicts, struggles and other voices inside the organisation. This approach was not adopted in an effort to provide the image of a conflict-free, harmonious organisation, nor as an irreflexive way of 'taking the side' of a hypothetical dominant voice inside the organisation. Rather, this focus on continuity is methodologically motivated. Being interested in processes through which feminist organising has been historically created and transmitted, I interrogated my object of research, the Milan

⁴ Leaflet *Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi*, 1976, consulted at ALM at FB, Milan (3.1. B. 20, F. 8) and ALD at FB, Milan (1.1. B. 20, F. 8). The text will be published in Sottosopra (1976a).

Women's Bookstore, in light of related and consequent questions. Therefore, in some ways the object itself led me to search for clues and follow traces that put me on the path of organisational continuity. Clearly, there are other questions that can be asked, other stories to be told – and many of them would certainly be speaking of conflicts. Further research (with new fieldwork and new interviews) could entail following traces of dissent and clashes among organisation members so as to not only obtain a deeper picture of the political standing of this organisation but also, potentially, ascertain if such conflicts gave rise to new groups or organisations with different political and organising views.

Moreover, the study's conclusions could be enhanced by adding a comparative lens. It would be useful to use fieldwork to observe similar processes across time and space, namely in other feminist bookstores and abroad. This would help in understanding how the recursive interplay between theories and practices in organising is shaped in different contexts and, specifically, in clarifying if and how the processual methodology described here varies depending on the socio-cultural context and/or the philosophical underpinnings. In addition, what would we learn about organising and the transmission of feminist heritage if we took other fields into consideration beyond the cultural one? To what extent is the nature of these processes specific to the cultural field? This research was designed to grant a prominent position to field and archival work, yet it could have been expanded by broadening the literature on social movements in order to study how processes of entwinement between theories and practices have been studied and conceptualised in the context of other political organisations.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Archival documents

N	NAME	SOURCE
1	Material concerning the DEMAU group.	Archivio del Femminismo at Fondazione Badaracco, Milan, 1. B. 36, F. 2.
2	<i>Rivolta Femminile</i> manifesto, English version, 5 pages, 1970.	AF at FB, Milan, B. 47, F. 5.
3	Casa Editrice Rivolta Femminile, typewritten text, one page, October 1978.	AF at FB, Milan, B. 47, F. 5.
4	Typewritten text presentation of the publishing house in English entitled “ <i>Scritti di Rivolta Femminile. Manifesto</i> ”, one page, Rome, July 1970.	AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.
5	Invoice to Rivolta Femminile, “Fattura n. 22”, 16 th December 1980.	ALD at FB, Milan, section “Administrative documents”, 1.5. B. 26, “Fatture fornitori M-Z. 1980”.
6	Text by Rivolta Femminile. <i>Per l’identificazione di Rivolta Femminile</i> , signed “Rivolta Femminile”, typewritten text, Rome, 4 th February 1972.	AF at FB, B. 47, F. 5.
7	Leaflet on the ‘practice of doing’. <i>Il tempo, i mezzi e i luoghi</i> , 1976.	ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 8 and ALD at FB,

		Milan, 1.1. B. 20, F. 8. Published in <i>Sottosopra</i> , issue of 20 th January 1976.
8	<i>I luoghi delle femministe e la pratica del movimento</i> , 1975.	ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 8.
9	Untitled text by <i>Casa Editrice delle Donne</i> , Rome.	ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 8.
10	Communication on «Sottosopra». <i>Comunicato programmatico sul "Sottosopra"</i> , typewritten text, two pages, with no name or date.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Sottosopra", 1974-1975, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3.
11	Communication on «Sottosopra». <i>Proposta di pubblicazione del secondo numero</i> , typewritten text, two pages, with no name, dated 18 th January 1974 and sent from Milan.	ALD at FB, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3.
12	Communication on «Sottosopra». <i>Comunicato sull'organizzazione e i costi della pubblicazione</i> .	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3.
13	<i>Scrivere, pubblicare, fare un giornale, e la pratica politica del movimento</i> , 1975.	ALM at FB, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 7, and ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3.
14	Statute of the Circolo cooperativo delle donne "Sibilla Aleramo" alias Libreria delle Donne di Milano, <i>Statuto, Scarselli Giuliana ecc...</i> , 7 pages, 25 th June 1975.	ALD at FB, section "Apertura della Libreria", 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.
15	<i>Giornale Mastro</i> , 1975-1976, register 1.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Administrative documents", 1.5. B. 4, F. 1.

16	Press review and Dossier.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Femminismo U.S.A.", 1.2. B. 6, F. 1.
17	Virginia Lee Warren, <i>A Bookshop for Feminists</i> , «The New York Times», 15 th July 1975.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Femminismo U.S.A.", 1.2. B. 6, F. 1.
18	Correspondence with the Women's Bookshop of Zürich (letter from the Frauenbuchladen by Regula Schenk, 1 st December 1976).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.
19	<i>Abbiamo trovato un negozio nel centro di Milano...</i> , Circolo cooperativo "Sibilla Aleramo" – Libreria delle Donne, 18 th December 1974, 1 page [d].	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.
20	<i>Cara, tra le donne che a Milano...</i> , unsigned, attributed to 1974, 1 page [d].	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.
21	Leaflet for the opening of the bookstore, 1975, <i>Si è aperta a Milano, in Via Dogana 2, la Libreria delle Donne</i> .	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Manifesti", 1.3. B. 1. F. 1.
22	<i>Breve Storia della Libreria</i> , typewritten text, 4 pages, 1984.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 10, F. 1.
23	Communication letter to a publishing house, <i>Vi comunichiamo che a partire...</i> , Circolo cooperativo "Sibilla Aleramo" – Libreria delle Donne, 1 page, 22 nd July 1975.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1.
24	Invitation to journalists and press conference (Comunicato alle giornaliste e invito alla conferenza stampa), <i>È prossima l'apertura...</i> , Libreria delle Donne, 3 rd October 1975.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B.2.

25	Correspondence between Libreria and «EFFE» (1977).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.
26	Correspondence with Edizioni Dedalo (23 rd October 1975).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.
27	Correspondence with «Donna Woman Femme» (DWF).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.
28	Communication with «Notiziario del centro di documentazione di Pistoia», 29 th October 1975. And Letter from the Pistoia Center (22 nd April 1977).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8. And ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 3.
29	Letter to «Editoriale di Padova», <i>Care compagne...</i> , typewritten text, 1 page, 5 th November 1975.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 8.
30	Newspapers clippings covering the opening event of Libreria, 1975.	ALD at FB, Milan 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.
31	Daily payments. <i>Corrispettivi</i> ("Incassi a fine giornata"), 1975-1989, register 1.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.5. B. 3, F. 3.
32	Communication on a political meeting, <i>Comunicato di convocazione di una riunione sull'impegno politico dell'8 marzo e sulla pratica delle bancarelle di vendita dei libri</i> , 1 piece, 22 nd February 1977.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 4.
33	Introduction and presentation of the "cartella grafica", realised for the bookstore opening by artists (<i>Accardi Carla, Bentivoglio Mirella, Berardinone Valentina ecc.</i>) and curated by Vergine Lea (the flyer for the invite is dated 16 th December 1975).	ALD at FB, section "Apertura della Libreria", 1974-1978, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.

34	Transcript of the meeting "L'altra metà dell'avanguardia: donne e arte" (1980).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 9.
35	<i>Non esiste un punto di vista femminista</i> (1977).	ALM at FD, Milan, 3.1. B. 20, F. 12 and ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 2.
36	<i>Green Catalogue</i> , preparatory texts and notes. <i>Sulla servitù della scrittura. E sulle sue grandi possibilità. Catalogo di testi di teoria e pratica politica</i> (1978).	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 6.
37	First «Via Dogana» complete series (1983-1984).	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 6.
38	Leaflets and manifestos of books published by <i>Des Femmes</i> , Paris and some <i>Des Femmes</i> movements calendars.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Manifesti", <i>Des Femmes</i> , 1977-1978, Paris, 3.3. B. 1, F. 5.
39	Editorial of the first «Via Dogana» paper ("Via Dogana N.0", May 1983).	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 6.
40	<i>Via Dogana</i> , press release dated 2 nd June 1983, Milan.	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 34, F. 5.
41	Invitation for the press to the launch of the third issue of «Via Dogana», November 1991.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3.
42	Journal articles on the new opening of the «Via Dogana» magazine.	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.3 B. 35, F. 1.
43	Manifesto for the publishing of the second «Via Dogana» paper.	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.2. B. 35, F. 1.
44	Press release on the first number of «Via Dogana» (1991), <i>Abbiamo mandato</i>	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3.

	<i>in tipografia il primo numero della nuova Via Dogana</i> , typewritten text, 2 pages.	
45	Invite to the public discussion of «Via Dogana» n.7, 2 nd December 1992.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 5, F. 3.
46	Umanitaria Conference Proceedings, Società Umanitaria, Milan, 27 th -28 th October 1979, and leaflet on the 1979 Law Proposal on violence against women.	ALD at FB, Milan, 1.1. B. 1, F. 7.
47	Journal article <i>Cambiare la proposta di legge sulla violenza sessuale? Sì, con una nuova pratica politica fondata sulla soggettività delle donne</i> , «Il Manifesto», 12 th December 1979, signed by Luisa Abbà, Piera Bosotti, Bibi Tomasi, Lia Cigarini, Maria Gregorio, Lea Melandri, Luisa Muraro and Franca Spirito.	ALM at FB, 3.1. B. 21, F.2.
48	Paola di Cori (1987). <i>Per una storia del femminismo. L'autobiografia collettiva della Libreria delle Donne di Milano</i> , «Il Sole 24 Ore», 21 st October 1987.	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 6.
49	Letter from Clara Jourdan to Libreria delle Donne, dated 15 th August 1987.	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 6.
50	Poster celebrating the 5-year anniversary of the opening of the Libreria, <i>Manifesto di presentazione della Libreria e della sua pratica politica in occasione dei 5 anni dalla nascita</i> , 1980.	ALD at FB, Milan, series "Libreria 1980", 1.1. B. 1, F. 9.
51	Letter to Milan's Mayor dated 30 th October 1975, signed by Giordana Masotto.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Administrative documents", 1.5. B. 8.

52	Daily Organiser, <i>Agenda degli impegni gestionali giornalieri</i> (1 ott.-1 dic. 1975).	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1.
53	Documentation concerning a 1978 application for funding for cultural activities sponsored by Regione Lombardia.	ALD at FB, Milan, section "Administrative documents", Correspondence 1975-1979, 1.5, B. 8.
54	<i>Breve Storia della Libreria</i> (1984), typewritten text, 4 pages.	ALD at FB, Milan (1.5. B. 10, F. 1) and ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1 (draft with notes).
55	<i>Storia della Libreria delle Donne – Prima stesura</i> , typewritten text, 4 pages, 1979 or 1980, held at ALM at FB, Milan.	ALM at FB, Milan, 4.1. B. 33, F. 1.

Appendix 2. List of interviews

N	NAME	PLACE AND DATE
1	Alex Martinis Roe	Skype interview, Australia/Sweden, 11 th June 2018
2	Althea Greenan (The Women Art Library, Goldsmith University, London)	London, 26 th October 2017
3	Annarosa Buttarelli	Milan, 30 th May 2018
4	Assunta Lunardi	Milan, 17 th January 2018
5	Clara Jourdan	Milan, 12 th January 2018
6	Corrado Levi	Milan, 12 th September 2019
7	Cristiana Fischer	Mail interview, 14 th May 2018
8	Donatella Franchi	Telephone interview, 28 th March 2018; mail interview, Bologna/Milan, 3 rd April 2018; Bologna, 6 th April 2018 (in person interview).
9	Elena Alberti	Bologna, 6 th April 2018
10	Flora De Musso	Milan, 15 th December 2017; follow-up telephone interview 9 th January 2018.
11	Francesca Pasini	Mail interview, Milan, 1 st May 2018
12	Gail Chester (The Feminist Library, London)	London, 25 th October 2017
13	Giordana Masotto	Milan, 15 th December 2017
14, 15	Laura Capuzzo and Ilaria Durignon (Librati – Libreria delle Donne di	Mail interview, Padua/Milan, 28 th April 2018

	Padova)	
16	Laura Colombo	Milan, 8 th March 2018
17	Laura Giordano	Milan, 8 th June 2018
18	Laura Lepetit	Milan, 16 th November 2017
19	Laura Milani	Milan, 24 th January 2018
20	Laura Minguzzi	Milan, 13 th and 14 th Dec 2017
21	Letizia Bianchi	Bologna, 6 th April 2018
22	Lia Cigarini	Milan, 6 th December 2017
23	Luisa Abbà	Milan, 19 th December 2017
24	Luisa Muraro	Milan, 30 th November 2017
25	Maria Nadotti	Milan, June 2017
26	Mariri Martinengo	Milan, 25 th May 2018
27	Mirella Maifreda	Mail interview, Milan, 11 th June 2018
28	Patrizia Di Bello	London, 23 rd October 2017
29	Pinuccia Barbieri	Milan, 18 th December 2017 and 11 th January 2018
30	Renata Dionigi	Milan, 13 th December 2017
31	Rosaria Guacci	Milan, 7 th December 2017
32	Sara Gandini	Milan, 8 th March 2018
33	Sarah O'Mahoney (The Feminist Library, London)	London, 25 th October 2017
34	Serena Castaldi	Skype interview, Nice/Milan, 3 rd April 2016 and 21 st May 2019
35	Silvia Baratella	Milan, 21 st April 2018
36	Stefania Ferrando	Mail interview, Paris/Milan, 11 th October 2018

37	Stefania Giannotti	Milan, 16 th March 2018
38	Traudel Sattler	Milan, 21 st April 2018
39	Vita Cosentino	Milan, 30 th April 2018

Appendix 3. Feminist cultural activities and centres born in the Seventies and in the Eighties in Italy

NAME	TYPOLOGY	FOUNDIN G YEAR	CITY
Scritti di Rivolta Femminile	Publishing House	1970	ROME and MILAN
Le Nemesiache	Cultural Centre	1972	NAPLES
EFFE	Editorial Product	1973	ROME
Sottosopra	Editorial Product	1973	MILAN
La Maddalena	Cultural Centre	1973	ROME
Centro Documentazione Donna Padova	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1975	PADUA
Libreria delle Donne di Milano	Women's Bookshop	1975	MILAN
La Tartaruga	Publishing House	1975	MILAN
DWF	Publishing House	1975	ROME
Edizioni delle donne	Publishing House	1975	ROME
Casa delle Donne di Roma	Women's House	1976	ROME
Differenze	Editorial Product	1976	ROME
Cooperativa Beato Angelico	Art Cooperative	1976	ROME
Le Tre Ghinee – Nemesiache	Cultural Centre	1976	NAPLES

Biblioteca delle Donne Sorelle Benso	Women's Library	1976	TURIN
Libreria delle Donne di Torino	Women's Bookshop	1977	TURIN
Libreria Librellula Bologna	Women's Bookshop	1977	BOLOGNA
Libreria delle Donne di Cagliari	Women's Bookshop	1977	CAGLIARI
Centro della Donna	Women's House	1977	BRESCIA
Associazione Centro Studi	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1977	ROME
Quotidiano Donna	Editorial Product	1978	ROME and MILAN
Centro Documentazione e Studi sul Femminismo	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1978	ROME
Centro Culturale Virginia Woolf	Cultural Centre	1979	ROME
Orlando	Cultural Centre	1979	BOLOGNA
Casa delle Donne di Torino	Women's House	1979	TURIN
Centro Documentazione Donna Napoli	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1979	NAPLES
Centro Studi Storici sul Movimento di Liberazione della	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1979	MILAN

Donna in Italia (since 1994 Fondazione Elvira Badaracco)			
Centro Culturale Dimensione Donna	Cultural Centre	1979	COMO
Biblioteca delle Donne di Parma	Women's Library	1980	PARMA
Cicip&Ciciap	Cultural Centre and Restaurant	1980	MILAN
Leggere Donna	Editorial Product	1980	FERRARA
Libreria delle Donne di Firenze	Women's Bookshop	1980	FLORENCE
Centro Documentazione Donna	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1980	FERRARA
Centro Culturale Mara Meoni	Cultural Centre	1980	SIENA
Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne	Editorial Product	1981	TURIN
L'Orsaminore	Editorial Product	1981	ROME
Centro di Documentazione Bologna	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1982	BOLOGNA
Biblioteca Nazionale delle Donne di Bologna	Women's Library	1982	BOLOGNA
Centro Documentazione Donna	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1982	PISA

Via Dogana	Editorial Product	1983	MILAN
Diotima	Research Centre	1983	VERONA
Biblioteca delle Donne di Ancona	Women's Library	1983	ANCONA
Demetra: Associazione, gruppo culturale, centro di documentazione e Libreria delle Donne	Cultural Centre	1983	GENOA
La Biblioteca della Donna	Women's Library	1983	L'AQUILA
Centro Documentazione Donna Lidia Crepet	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1983	PADUA
Centro Documentazione L'acqua in gabbia	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1983	PORDENO NE
Il Filo di Arianna	Cultural Centre	1984	VERONA
Libreria Lilith – Libreria delle Donne di Carbonia	Women's Bookshop	1984	CARBONIA
Centro Studi Documentazione e Ricerca della Donna	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1984	CASERTA
Centro Documentazione e Ricerca Donne	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1985	FOGGIA

Centro di Documentazione sulla Salute delle Donna Simonetta Tosi	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1985	TURIN
La Casa di Accoglienza delle Donne Maltrattate di Milano	Anti-Violence Centre	1986	MILAN
Libera Università delle donne	Women's University	1987	MILAN
Lapis	Editorial Product	1987	MILAN
Foglio del Paese delle donne	Editorial Product	1987	ROME
Il Giardino dei Ciliegi	Cultural Centre	1988	FLORENCE
Madrigale. Trimestrale di politica e cultura delle donne	Editorial Product	1989	NAPLES
Centro Documentazione Donna Trieste	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1973 or 1975	TRIESTE
Rosa	Editorial Product	1974 or 1975	FLORENCE
Centro Documentazione Donna Firenze	Archival and/or Documentation Centre	1981/1982	FLORENCE
Biblioteca delle Donne di Savona	Women's Library	N/A [mid-Seventies]	SAVONA

Appendix 4. Synthetic timeline of *Libreria* key publications and key projects

	KEY TEXTS	KEY ACTIVITIES
1974	Independent women's movement journal "Sottosopra", review of the experiences of the feminist movement issue (titled <i>Esperienze dei gruppi femministi in Italia</i>) is published.	December: first documents on the bookshop project presentation and request for support.
1975	Independent women's movement journal "Sottosopra", sexuality issue (titled <i>Sessualità, procreazione, maternità, aborto</i>) is published.	Cooperative founded on 5 th May 1975; bookshops opens to the public on 15 th October 1975.
1976	Two issues of "Sottosopra" published. The <i>Pink Sottosopra</i> in December and the <i>Orange Sottosopra</i> in March (the issue containing the key text "Time, Means, Spaces" where <i>pratica del fare</i> is theorised).	
1977	Text <i>Non esiste un punto di vista femminista</i> on feminist cultural production.	
1978	Green Catalogue is published.	
1979	Texts and articles on Law against Violence.	
1980		
1981	Launch of "Via Dogana", the magazine by Libreria delle Donne.	
1982	Yellow Catalogue is published.	

1983	<i>Green Sottosopra</i> , “More Women than Men” (<i>Più donne che uomini</i>) is published. Humor satire publication by Libreria delle Donne di Milano “Aspirina. Rivista Acetilsatirica” is founded.	End of publication “Via Dogana”. Philosophical community Diotima founded in Verona.
1984		
1985		
1986		Group Ipazia, women scientific community, is founded.
1987	Publication of <i>Non credere di avere dei diritti. Blu Sottosopra</i> , special issue (<i>Sulla rappresentanza politica femminile, sull’arte di polemizzare tra donne e sulla rivoluzione scientifica in corso</i>) is published.	
1988		Group devoted to historical research is founded (“Comunità di pratica e riflessione pedagogica e di ricerca storica”).
1989	<i>Golden Sottosopra</i> (<i>Un filo di felicità</i>) is published.	
1990		
1991	First number of the new “Via Dogana” journal (the publication will last until 2014). Publication of <i>L’ordine simbolico della madre</i> by Luisa Muraro (Rome, Editori Riuniti).	Circolo della Rosa is founded.
1992		

1993		
1994		The Labour group is founded
1995	The book <i>La politica del desiderio</i> by Lia Cigarini is published (Parma, Pratiche Editori).	
1996	<i>Red Sottosopra (È accaduto non per caso)</i> is published.	
1997		
1998		
1999		
2000		
2001		Launch of the Libreria website. Launch of visual art programming <i>Quarta Vetrina</i> by Corrado Levi. Relocation from Via Dogana 2 to the new space of Via Pietro Calvi 29.
2002		
2003		
2004		
2005		
2006		The historical research community ("Comunità di pratica e riflessione pedagogica e di ricerca storica") becomes the Living history practice and research community ("Comunità di pratica di Storia Vivente"). Second phase in the visual art programming (curated by Donatella Franchi)

2007	Launch of the Thoughtful Writing School (which will last until 2017).	
2008		
2009	Sottosopra <i>Immagina che il lavoro</i> .	
2010		
2011		The Labour group launches a project of discussion on contemporary job market: "Agorà del Lavoro".
2012		
2013		Libreria website renewal. "Aspirina" goes online.
2014		
2015	<i>Fuochi. La cucina di Estia</i> , a book on the practice of relational cooking in the bookstore, is published.	Third phase in the visual art programming (curated by Francesca Pasini).
2016		Launch of the philosophical school for children, "Accademia delle piccole filosofe". Launch of the workshop on cities: "LabMi. La città del primum vivere. Laboratorio di progetto della città contemporanea".
2017		Writing School closes.
2018		
2019		Exhibition "Vetrine di Libertà", curated by Francesca Pasini at Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan (April-June 2019).

Appendix 5. Other documents, leaflets, manifestos

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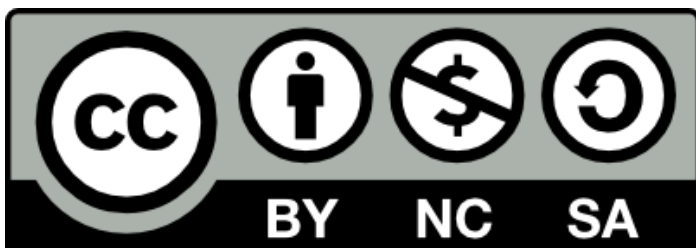
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