STORIES AND LANDSCAPES IN MILAN, ITALY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC URBAN SPACES.

by

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ABSTRACT

Based on fieldwork carried out in 2004/2005, this dissertation explores how different people and social groups participate in public space in Milan, Italy. In the first part of my work I discuss three different perspectives on public space and their implications on its openness and accessibility. First, I examine how a street forum by the largely Italian, middle class, association VivereMilano activates the ideal of public space as agora of the city, all while marginalizing issues of importance to less privileged residents of the city. Secondly, I look at how Milanese oppositional Social Centers depict urban space as deeply political and as a central locus and object of struggle. Thirdly, I look at some aspects of the complex relationship between immigration and urban space. Although public spaces are a precious resource for several new immigrants, they are usually the ones who have the hardest time to claim them as their own. In the second part of this thesis, I argue that visibility is an important aspect of city life. I trace how some people I met during my research used embodied practices of seeing and performative engagements to imagine and situate themselves in Milan's social landscape. I also reflect on how some oppositional groups adopt a language of (in)visibility to talk about inequality in the city, and to draw attention to the invisible social actors and the spatial ghosts of the postindustrial urban terrain. In this part of my work I theorize vision as embodied, multiple, and contested, and connected to circulating discourses on the way the city should look like and who should figure in it. As not every body can enter the field of vision in the same way, ways of seeing and appearing can reinforce gender, class, and race hierarchies in urban locales. In turn, less privileged inhabitants of Milan can use alternative ways of representing the city and their presence in it to help create a public space that would be more inclusive and egalitarian.
To Anna, Akash, and Junas.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval .............................................................................................................. ii 
Abstract ............................................................................................................ iii 
Dedication .......................................................................................................... iv 
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................. v 
Table of Contents ............................................................................................... vii 
List of Figures ..................................................................................................... viii 
A Note on Translation ........................................................................................ x
Part I. Public Space ............................................................................................. 1
  Introduction ...................................................................................................... 2
  Chapter One: Milan .......................................................................................... 28
  Chapter Two: The Colour of Public Space ..................................................... 51
  Chapter Three: Spatial Politics ..................................................................... 86
  Chapter Four: Creating Spaces, Constructing Selves .................................. 126
Part II. City of Visions ....................................................................................... 163
  Chapter Five: The Visual Lives of Public Spaces ....................................... 164
  Chapter Six: A Walk with Two Women: Vision, Gender, and Belonging .... 204
  Chapter Seven: Places and Stages: Narrating and Performing the City ..... 236
Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 279
Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 285
Notes .................................................................................................................... 297
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 ................................................................................................................................. 15
Figure 2 ................................................................................................................................. 30
Figure 3 ................................................................................................................................. 30
Figure 4 ................................................................................................................................ 30
Figure 5 ................................................................................................................................ 41
Figure 6 ................................................................................................................................ 57
Figure 7 ................................................................................................................................ 78
Figure 8 ................................................................................................................................ 89
Figure 9 ................................................................................................................................ 89
Figure 10 ................................................................................................................................. 89
Figure 11 ................................................................................................................................. 94
Figure 12 ................................................................................................................................. 94
Figure 13 ................................................................................................................................ 95
Figure 14 ................................................................................................................................ 95
Figure 16 ................................................................................................................................. 124
Figure 17 ................................................................................................................................. 150
Figure 18 ................................................................................................................................ 151
Figure 19 ................................................................................................................................ 164
Figure 20 ................................................................................................................................ 178
Figure 21 ................................................................................................................................ 178
Figure 22 ................................................................................................................................ 179
Figure 23 ................................................................................................................................ 180
Figure 24 ................................................................................................................................ 181
Figure 25 ................................................................................................................................ 181
Figure 26 ................................................................................................................................ 181
Figure 27 ................................................................................................................................ 182
Figure 28 ................................................................................................................................ 182
Figure 29

Figure 30

Figure 31

Figure 32

Figure 33

Figure 34

Figure 35

Figure 36

Figure 37

Figure 38

Figure 39

Figure 40

Figure 41

Figure 42

Figure 43

Figure 44

Figure 45

Figure 46

Figure 47

Figure 48

Figure 49

Figure 50

Figure 51

Figure 52

Figure 53

Figure 54
A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All translations of materials written or spoken in Italian – written publications, people’s quotes and interviews, websites, flyers, and pamphlets, are mine. This also includes the manifesto of VivereMilano, and the presentation and materials of the workshop “Building Zenobia”.
PART I. PUBLIC SPACE
INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I explore how people and social groups inhabit public space in Milan, the largest city of Northern Italy. This includes the way in which different people use, appropriate, and journey through spaces, the way they narrate and imagine them, and the visual landscapes they create and participate in. In doing so, I follow many researchers' insights that space is a complex, dynamic, and contested aspect of society, shaping and shaped by social relations (see for example Lefebvre, 1991). Several debates, developments, and ideas have brought me to this research area and to the specific forms of my questions. To start, the fact that an increasingly large part of the world's population lives in urban communities, and that most cities have recently experienced important changes, has prompted the question of whether and how contemporary cities can develop social justice and participatory democracy. Scholars have been particularly interested in urban public space, as it can be both a site of exclusion for less privileged members of society as well as a necessary ideal for attaining equality and encouraging diversity in urban locales (see for example Caldeira, 2000, and Low, 2000).

Several studies have argued that the ways in which people inhabit and use public space affects and is affected by their participation in the wider society (Mitchell 2003 and 1995; Razack, 2000). Visible minorities and non-citizens, for example, are often excluded in various ways and to various degrees from full participation in public urban space (Holston, 1999). In turn, spatial segregation...
has often been used to define somebody as a racial other, and/or an outsider to the national community (Hayden, 1995). Merry (2001) and Caldeira (2000) also point out how the surveillance and enclosing of urban spaces can serve to control people, to limit the social interactions they engage in, and ultimately to erode participatory democracy within the city.

At the same time, the emergence of new urban public spaces that resemble each other in much of the world has prompted a renewed interest in how places are linked by histories, struggles and multiple meanings. Guano (2003), Nicolini (1998), and Pratt (1988), for example, show that a simple walk in the city can unearth a whole universe of stories, memories, and interpretations, which are deeply connected not just to one person's life but also to wider social, economic, and cultural processes and structures. City streets, plazas, and avenues then emerge as a lived landscape, criss-crossed with complicated relations, imaginaries, and structures of power which are negotiated, reconstructed or challenged in everyday urban life.

The very term landscape is connected to interesting ideas around vision, visibility, and perspective as important aspects in the negotiation of power and identity within urban communities. As Rose writes, landscape is "a way of seeing which we learn" (Rose, 1993: 87). To say it simply, the way the city looks is a matter of what can be seen and by whom, and of which images of the city get to count as truly representing it. Urban landscapes are constructed by a practice of looking, interpreting, and recognizing, which makes visible certain things and/or people and excludes others from the picture (Guano, 2003; Dines, 2002;
This focus on vision echoes visual anthropologists' efforts to investigate cultures of seeing and appearing in order to understand how societies deploy images and ways of looking to structure and organize social relations. In this way, the visual can also help anthropologists rethink the very categories they are using to understand people's lives (Pink, 2001; Banks and Morphy, 1997).

A focus on the visuality of public urban life has been particularly helpful for my research, as in Milan seeing and being seen has always been an important medium for social encounters. Investigating how people use vision to participate in the city has been a starting point for exploring contested claims to Milanese spaces. Moreover, because people's acts of seeing are intimately connected to their embodied location in the urban terrain, a focus on vision also led me to address performative engagements within public space. Rather than treating vision as transparent, fixed, and distancing, I trace how some people's relations with city landscapes encompass their imagination, creativity, and corporeal engagements, while having important political consequences for belonging and social exclusion. In addition to urban and visual anthropology, then, I found performative frameworks very useful for addressing some aspects of life in Milan (Fleetwood, 2004; Thrift, 2003; Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Fabian, 1990).

Last but not least, Milan is the city where I was born and grew up in. My sense that I, too, have been part of its history, in the same way as its history has been part of my life, have made me particularly alert to the many ghosts and phantoms of this city, and the ways in which things remembered and forgotten
shape the alternating of absences and presences in urban terrains. In this I found particularly inspiring the work of Gordon (1997), who insists that specters are relevant for social analysis because they have far-reaching, important effects in the world. The importance of social, spatial, and political ‘shadows’ in Milan is emphasized by a group of researchers and activists (see Chapter Five) who say that Milan today is “a city in which the obvious and the occult flow into one another”; a city in which the canals it was built around, and with, have been buried underground, because, in this city, memory is often treated as something dispensable (Zenobia presentation, March 9, 2005).

By drawing on these ideas, questions, and bodies of literature, in this dissertation I explore how urban landscapes, narratives, and spaces intersect to shape people’s experiences of belonging and exclusion in Milan. In the first part of my work, I trace different conceptions of public space and discuss some of the implications for their accessibility. A central argument that I make in Part I is that public space is a fleeting concept and an ever-changing, shifting construction. On such uncertain terrain, people both negotiate what public space is/can be and seek to stake their claims to it.

To say it differently, when I was trying to explore people’s uses of and ideas about public space, I was faced with a category that was melting in front of my eyes. Whereas in the academic literature public space is usually described as plazas, parks, and streets which are not private but publicly owned, and which are accessible to all, for the people I talked to there was no such thing as a clear definition of public space. People in Milan included all sorts of locations in this
category, such as coffee shops, cinemas, bars, courtyards, public health centers, churches, subways and public transit, illegally occupied buildings and social centers. This speaks to the fact that public spaces are also places that "work as such" for a particularly situated social actor. While this conceptualization can work to evade the questions of whose public spaces are considered more important than others, and who gets excluded from which kinds of spaces, it does emphasize that public space is tied to a whole array of ideas, practices, and histories. To put it simply, to talk about public space in Milan is to talk about a lot of other things, including immigration, air pollution, politics, and fashion, and in turn most debates in Milan end up addressing public space in a way or another.

A middle aged professional Italian woman I met on the bus, moreover, asked me if I was looking at public spaces as physical loci, or as lived social places where people meet and interact with each other. The difference between the two (also theorized by Lefebre (1991), de Certeau (1984), and Low (2000) - see Chapter Four) points out that in Italy, a long history of uses of public space might support and/or complicate current (and changing) meanings and deployments of those spaces. Each of the plazas of the centre has been used for decades, sometimes even centuries, by many (and sometimes antagonist) groups and individuals to engage in widely different activities - such as setting up markets, holding church and carnival processions, judging the bankrupts (see Chapter Seven), participating in armed battles, and much more. My work can then be understood as an attentive listening to how certain people might activate
and/or interpellate particular ‘layers’ of public spaces and the different meanings and histories connected to them.

In order to elucidate the complexity of these connections, and to show that they matter for the way in which certain publics more than others can legitimately and easily use streets and plazas, the first part of my dissertation focuses on three perspectives on public space which I learned from particular encounters in Milan. In Chapter Two, I examine how a street forum organized by the largely Italian, middle class association VivereMilano activates the ideal of public space as the agora of the city, all while marginalizing issues of importance to less privileged residents. In contrast, in Chapter Three, I look at how oppositional Social Centers depict urban space as deeply political, and as a central locus and object of struggle. Finally, in Chapter Four, I look at some aspects of the complex relationship between immigration and urban space. Although public spaces are a precious resource for several new immigrants, the later are usually the ones who have the hardest time to claim them as their own. These three ways of addressing and understanding Milanese public spaces are obviously not the only possible ones. Nonetheless, their juxtaposition shows how different conceptions, uses, and imaginaries co-exist and complicate public space and people’s participation in it. As a background for my analysis, in Chapter One I will introduce the city of Milan to the reader.

Building on these discussions of Milanese public space, in the second part of this thesis I argue that the concept of visibility is an important aspect of public urban life. By examining how certain spaces, structures, and processes enable or
produce (in)visibilities, I look at how people who are differently positioned within the city might participate in and create different landscapes. I ask the following questions: How do different people talk about what is visible and what is invisible in their city/neighbourhood? How can urban spaces create conditions under which some people (and some of their identities) can be seen and some cannot? How do people use vision to participate and situate themselves in Milanese public space?

In Chapter Five, I theorize vision as embodied, multiple, and contested. In this part of my work, I use both images and words to think about the concept of landscape and the role of vision in public space and urban daily life. My analysis in this chapter is informed by the insights of several activist groups, who use an idiom of (in)visibility and ghostly appearances as a way to draw attention to inequality in Milan. While these groups do not directly talk about public space, their focus on the vast abandoned industrial lots and buildings of the city is part of an ongoing debate on the use of space in Milan, and on the need for new spaces, both public and private, that could provide better living conditions for its inhabitants.

In Chapter Six and Seven I describe three walking tours through the centre of Milan by three differently positioned city dwellers. First, I compare the journeys of Francesca, an Italian middle class woman, to the one of Maria Anacleta, who moved to Milan from the Philippines. My two guides do not just show me different things in the streets and plazas of the centre. Vision itself becomes a way in which they relate to the city and find a place in it. A sense of
belonging, albeit very different for the two women, emerged both when Maria Anacletta asked me to take pictures of herself in particular places to show her family, and through Francesca’s talk about “beauty” in the city and her practice of seeing and recognizing it as she walked in its midst.

The differences and the connections between the women’s itineraries show that modalities of seeing and appearing can often reinforce gender, class, and race hierarchies in urban locales. In turn, as I argue in Chapter Seven, less privileged inhabitants of Milan can use alternative ways of representing the city and their presence in it to help create a public space that would be more inclusive and egalitarian. In Chapter Seven, by presenting a walk I was guided in by Mohamed Ba, I also reflect on the relation between vision and performativity. In his walk, Mohamed uses plazas and streets as stages in order to enact an utopian public space. In order to do so, his words and journeys through spaces reformulate and reinterpret visibilities and invisibilities, and interweave presences and absences in the city terrain.

To investigate public space in Milan, I carried out six months of fieldwork in the city, from October 2004 to April 2005. This entailed participant observation of places and events, unstructured conversations, and interviews with thirty people (or series of interviews in the case of Don Felice, Francesca, Franca, and Maria Anacletta). The interviews varied in form, length, and location. In some interviews I asked participants to draw a map of Milan, and of the public spaces they use (see for example Tupeshka, 2001). While in a few cases people drew detailed and elaborate maps of the city (see for example Paola Rottola’s map, in
Chapter One), in most cases mapmaking provided just a springboard for my interlocutors to reflect and comment on the city, its spaces, and their lives in it. The difference between interviews that happened in closed spaces (such as cafes and homes), and the ones that took place while sitting, standing, and walking in streets and plazas were illuminating for my project. In the latter interviews, the city with its sights, sounds, and movements, and the unpredictability and ephemerality of its daily life seemed to seep into our very conversations. (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four.) People could refer to the city as it was happening around us, and rather than talking about public space as an abstract idea and an ambiguous concept, they could point to this public space, how they related to it, what they saw in it, how they liked and disliked it, and what brought them there.

To say it differently, while the interviews in closed locales were a commentary about public space, the ones in public space were also, at the same time, an engagement with it. City walks were a particular case in point. During my research, I asked six women and three men to guide me through “their” Milan, to show me the public spaces that were significant for them. During these itineraries, my guides interacted with people and places around us, telling me at the same time about the city and about their lives. Here I want to point out that these walks were interesting not because they exemplified, so-to-speak, a ‘day in the life of the city’ for my guides. For one, the itineraries were a shared journey, and my presence clearly shaped what my guides decided to show me (I discuss this in Chapter Six and Seven). For the other, because of the complexity and
indeterminacy of public space, I wonder if there ever can be a 'typical day' in my guide's interaction with public space. The walking tours, then, were interesting for my project, because they brought to the fore particular processes of negotiations and ways of seeing the city that were available to my interlocutors in that particular instance.

Participants were drawn in one of two ways. About half of the participants were the result of personal connections and/or of snowball sampling. The other half of my interlocutors and guides were people I met in a public space itself—mostly in one of the plazas and streets of the centre, but in the case of Jacopo, Franca, and a few others, in a place that momentarily worked as such: a Social Center, an open courtyard, and a university campus. Both through meetings in city locales and through snowball sampling, I tried to talk to people who would be of different classes, nationalities, gender, and ages. In the case of participants I met in streets and plazas, public space enabled social encounters with people who were different than me in one way or another. An example of this was my encounter with Maria Anacleta, as well as with street sellers who were operating in the centre. The same can also be said of my meetings with older people, with more privileged persons, as well as with a local politician. As a student doing research on the power of public space, I was happy to find out that, in some respect, public spaces were working as they should: to promote random encounters between differently positioned people.

At the same time, I realized that my being a middle class, white Italian woman was an important part of this equation. The fact that I could identify at
least in part with the particular public that Milanese public spaces have arguably been designed for, made it easier for me to activate public space for my purposes (I discuss this in Chapter Two). Here I also want to point out that as a person who was born and grew up in Milan, I could most times be seen as an insider to the city. However, in other respects, my peculiar position as a person in-between-places (I am an immigrant in Canada but my closest friends and natal family are all in Milan) muddled up this status, and reminded me, as Narayan wrote in 1993, that everyone is an insider and outsider in different ways in different circumstances. This means both that I related differently to different people, and that, as a native and a stranger, an Italian and a Canadian, a low-income student and a member of a middle-class family, a married woman with a husband and son yet a single mother in Italy, I was often at least two things at once (see for example Chapter Six).

Students like Don Felice, Jacopo, and the Schuster Youth, saw in me another student struggling with ideas, with books, and with a cumbersome thesis project. Yet, in relation to the Schuster Youth, for example, it was obvious to all three of us that I was in a privileged position. This brought the Youth to make sure I understood that public space was for them and many others a particularly precious resource, that I had probably always just taken for granted. For journalists and researchers from Terre di Mezzo, a street newspaper, I was a kind of journalist too, interested like them in stories, spaces, and issues of social justice. One of the main differences between us, however, was that we were writing for very different audiences. While the people from Terre di Mezzo are
part of a project to educate Italian Milaneses about aspects of their city that they know little about, I was writing for academic readers. This makes me hope that I will write this thesis again, but in a way that might be more accessible to non-academic people in Milan. When I visited Social Centers I could be an ally and a sympathizer, and I brought with me a history of involvement with activist groups in Germany and Canada. However, not having been part of local and strenuous occupations and actions, also made me a clear outsider to their project. For Milanese women I was both somebody they could relate to and recognize as Milanese, and a “strange native” who had forgotten some of the ways to be in Milan through my long absence. Because they saw me as needing their guidance and instructions, they often positioned themselves as teachers.

In relation with international migrants like Maria Anacleta, Marta, Mohamed, and Don Felice, I was both a Milanese, thus part of a society that often discriminated against them, and an immigrant somewhere else. On the one hand, I too had a divided family and lived the intense longing for a home that was most of the times far away. Many of them asked me for information about life in Canada, visas, and how it is to be there as an immigrant. On the other hand, this all did not take away the fact that I could pass as a regular Milanese in most circumstances, and that I was living in a much easier position than people like Maria Anacleta and Marta. In relation with VivereMilano, the association I talk about in Chapter Two, as a thirty-five year old middle class (temporary) resident, I found myself an automatic member. While I appreciated the enthusiasm of this association and their wanting to go out in the streets to do something good about
the city, I also felt uncomfortable being counted in. While I had been coincidentally wearing an orange scarf all autumn (orange being the colour chosen by the group to represent itself), after December I often left it at home or hid it in my pocket. I will discuss these issues also in the individual chapters.

Of the interviews I carried out with thirty people, in this dissertation I focus particularly on the encounters, conversations and city walks I had with eight persons. I describe these in Chapter Three, Four, Six, and Seven. Of the associations and groups I met, I found the work of VivereMilano, of the project “Building Zenobia”, and of Terre di Mezzo particularly inspiring, and will discuss it in Chapter Two and Five. In regards to city spaces, I concentrated mostly on central public spaces, although my discussion includes places like the Schuster Centre, the Leoncavallo, and Casa Loca, that are close to the periphery, and the Isola neighbourhood that is quite centrally located, but could still qualify as a periphery within the city centre (Zajczyk, 2005). The map in the next page shows Milan and the most significant places I refer to in this dissertation. One of the reasons why I have concentrated on the centre is because its public spaces are arguably the biggest and symbolically most important ones for the city (see for example the analysis of Moroni in Chapter Three). Indeed, almost all of my interlocutors referred to the public spaces of the centre in their comments and walks.

Secondly, giving more attention to more places further from the centre and closer to the periphery would have been overwhelming for my project at this time. This however, is one of the limitations of my work, and if I were to continue my
Map of Milan, elaborated on the basis of the maps of the municipality of Milan.
research, as I hope to do, I would start by giving more attention to the periphery and to other non-central areas, and to their relation with central public places. The same can be said about parks, which are important public spaces in Milan yet are almost totally absent from my writing. Very interesting things have been happening with parks in Milan, including efforts to contain them and fence them in, as well as conflicts about their uses by immigrant groups (see Chapter Four). Here however, I chose not to focus on parks because their uses and characteristics are quite different from streets and plazas and they would almost need a separate inquiry.

During my research, I felt that I needed to consider a wide range of places, people, and processes. I became interested in fashion and the politics of appearances, the difficulties of live-in domestic helpers, the struggles of Social Centers, the internet life of urban places, and the legacy of Catholicism in the conceptualization of public space (to name just a few). I felt strongly that all this needed to be included in my analysis. While this can make my writing appear rather fragmentary, it is also a witness to the multiple connections and layers intersecting public spaces. Indeed, during my research, I was fascinated by how certain topics, ideas, locations, and stories kept emerging in different versions at different times and places. It was like that for the figure of Leonardo da Vinci and San Precario, for the ideas and imaginaries of the Social Centers, for the water of Milan, and for stories such as the one of Piazza Fontana. It was like that for places such as the Navigli canals, Corso Buenos Aires, and the Duomo. To explain it through an analogy, I felt that I was living in a web which grew denser
every day, and in which every story had been told many times already (without this making it any less important). Nothing can express it better than this Calvino’s quote:

I am producing too many stories at once because what I want is for you to feel, around the story, a saturation of other stories that I could tell and maybe will tell or who knows may already have told on some other occasion, a space full of stories that perhaps is simply my lifetime, where you can move in all directions, as in space, always finding stories that cannot be told until other stories are told first, and so, setting out from any moment or place, you encounter always the same density of material to be told. In fact, looking in perspective at everything I am leaving out of the main narration, I see something like a forest that extends in all directions and is so thick that it doesn’t allow light to pass: a material, in other words, much richer than what I have chosen to put in the foreground this time, so it is not impossible that the person who follows my story may feel himself a bit cheated, seeing that the stream is dispersed into so many trickles, and that of the essential events only the last echoes and reverberations arrive at him; but it is not impossible that this is the very effect I aimed at when I started narrating, or let’s say it’s a trick of the narrative art that I am trying to employ, a rule of discretion that consists in maintaining my position slightly below the narrative possibilities at my disposal. (Calvino, 1981[79]: 109)

To conclude this part of my writing, I want to point out that this is an ethnography in a genre-stretching way. Milan was obviously too vast for carrying out participant observation of the entire city. If I concentrated only on one neighbourhood or group, however, I would have missed many other stories, connections, and ideas, that mattered for its public spaces. For this reason, I combined participant observation with interviews, and with literature reviews. The latter included works published by scholars and various organizations; books, reports, and articles, but also flyers, signs, and internet sites. The most ethnographic part of my work, then, is in the ways in which my inhabiting the city,
and my particular journeys in it, allowed me to trace connections between people, groups and histories, that co-inhabit and shape the forms and meanings of Milanese public space. To say it differently, my research represents in itself a lived itinerary through the city. Like the one of my interlocutors, it links places and stories, things forgotten, remembered, and longed for, imagination and curiosity. This also means that because of the vastness and complexity of the city, and because of the particularity of my journeys and of my positionality, my knowledge of the city and engagement with its associations is necessarily, and painfully, partial and incomplete. Still, I believe that my research contributes to current debates on public space by addressing some of its dynamics in a particular setting, as well as suggesting possible ways to understand, conceptualize, and represent it.

**Milanese encounters**

I.

On a bus, there is an elderly woman looking for somebody to chat with. She tells me how she has moved to Milan from Puglia, a region in the South of Italy, when she was eighteen years old. “[It is as if] I was born in Anfossi street!”, she explains emphatically, to show me her attachment to the Milanese neighbourhood she has been living in almost all her life. Another woman on the bus overhears our conversation. She comments angrily: “Then you are NOT Milanese! You were not born here!” (Fieldnotes, November 26, 2004)
II.
In the large empty space of a subway station, in the passage between its two entrances, there is a group of seven youths. It is five o’clock in the afternoon. They speak Spanish to each other, they have brought music, and are starting to dance. When I ask them what they are doing and why, the youths tell me that they meet every day here because there is space to dance. One of them quickly and urgently adds: “Also the Italians come here”. This last sentence haunts me for days. In it I hear a counterargument to a local discourse about immigrants using public spaces in a different way than Italians do. What it says, in other words, is that they dance every day in the subway not because they are not Italians, but because the unusually large smooth floor of this part of the station makes for a wonderful dance floor, which is at the same time free, accessible, and warm in the winter. (Fieldnotes, November 25, 2004)

III.
I enter in a bakery with my son. An older Egyptian couple runs it. He comes and goes from the back of the shop, bringing croissants, focacce, and buns. The woman wraps my bread in a white paper bag. It’s six ’o clock, the city is busy, in the small quiet shop we are all looking tired. The two bakers stop and look at me for a while. Perhaps they are trying to guess who my son’s father might be, seeing that he has a darker skin than I do (they will ask me about him the next time I pass by the bakery).
“Where do you come from?” they inquire. I am surprised. It is usually Italians who ask Egyptians where they are from. “From Milan”. I say. “I was born here”. “Ah, but really Milanese?” They ask with evident surprise. I am looking for words. How to say that I might be Milanese in some ways but not in others? That they are perhaps more Milanese than me? That still I am aware that many people in Milan would consider me to be Milanese but not them? And would they think this all matters? “Yes,” I respond, “I am Milanese” and quickly add “but I do not live here. I live in Canada right now. But yes I was born here, my parents and brother and cousins live here, and I feel at home here…”

(Fieldnotes, November 26, 2004).

The concept of “Milanese-ness” is one of the important aspects which informs this research. As these anecdotes express, terms of identity, belonging, and difference – such as Milanese, extracomunitario, Italian, and stranger are important yet shifting categories in town. The word Milanese in particular is a powerful category that can be used in many different ways. “Milanese” refers to people born in Milan, and, depending on the speaker, it can also include those who have lived in the city a significant number of years. Often, however, it is used in an exclusionary way, to mark degrees of entitlement and belonging to the city, and to discriminate against foreign immigrants and South Italians. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the word extracomunitario designates people who come to Italy from outside the European Union. Commonly used to refer to
immigrants, this term means literally, a “person who is not part of the community”, thereby subtly distinguishing between an “us” and an “others”.

The way in which different people consider themselves and others to be Milanese or not complicates ways of thinking about public space, and who should figure in it. As Tsing writes:

_Place making is always a cultural as well as a political-economic activity. It involves assumptions about the nature of those subjects authorized to participate in the process and the kinds of claims they can reasonably put forth about their position in [urban,] national, regional, and world classifications and hierarchies of places. The specificities of these subjects and claims contradict and misstate those of other place makers, even as they may form overlaps and links._ (Tsing, 2000: 338)

Recent conflicts in Milan’s ‘Chinatown’ are an interesting example for how “assumptions about the nature” of particular residents informs debate on who belongs to the city, and who the city belongs to. In April 2007, a parking ticket to a Chinese-Milanese shoe retailer sparked demonstrations, violent clashes, and car burning. According to the _Repubblica_ newspaper, “three hundred Chinese” took part in the “revolt”, and twenty people were hurt (“Guerra di Strada …”, 2007). The event generated racist comments especially from the local right wing political parties (although many people in Milan also sympathized with the Chinese residents of the neighbourhood, who had seen an escalation of police control in recent times). Many of the responses to these struggles recycled commonly held notions that ‘Chinese have taken over the area’, and that the latter has to be saved from being completely appropriated by the former. This way of thinking ignores that many “Chinese” people in Milan have been living there for generations. It also contrasts “Chinese” and “Italian” uses of the
neighbourhood. Because the latter is depicted as upholding the “authentic” face of the area, the former becomes, by default, a disruption to it (see also Maritano, 2004; Dines, 2002).

If the concept of Milanese-ness is important for my research, so is the notion of encounters. In this dissertation I use the latter term to stress that I seek to understand, question, and describe public space from particularly situated perspectives. My knowledge of public space derives from the insights of the people and groups I met during my time in Milan. Instead of assuming that there is such a thing as public space and that I need to use general theories to explain its characteristics and features, here I take public space as an object which becomes meaningful and intelligible from the point of view of particularly situated people and/or groups. This is of course not to say that rules, regulation, urban planning, and historical events do not create and/or affect public spaces. The latter are a material location, and as Mitchell and Staeheli (2005) point out, property relations do shape places and what can be done in them. However, these structures are put into use, activated, changed and interpreted by people through their daily lives in the city (see for example Moroni’s geo-history of Milan in Chapter Three). In this process, stories, imaginaries, struggles, and alliances help determine what a public space can be, for whom, and in which contexts (Low, 2000). Looking at the particular ways in which public space becomes meaningful for particularly situated people helps us see the contours of power that structures both places and identities. It helps us see how people’s place in
the city both shapes and is shaped by their particular social conditions (Razack, 2000; Holston and Appadurai, 1999).

Through the notion of encounters I also want to point out that the people I met are for me the creators of theories on public space, and that their uses of the latter are not just particular examples of more general conceptualizations. Both Steedly (1993) and Tsing (1993) point out that often participants in ethnographies have been seen as providing examples for wider theories. Rather than applying universal concepts to local realities, anthropologists should instead learn from and with "locally engaged theory" (Tsing, 1993: 32). My interlocutors taught me particular ways of looking at public space and provided me with models to follow. To name just a few, Zenobia, the activists of the Stecca degli Artigiani, and others, suggested I look at spatial phantoms (see Chapter Five). Mohamed Ba taught me a model for public space, according to which intersecting stories and itineraries enable the depth of history and the power of imagination necessary for the realization of public space as a living utopia (Chapter Seven). And Francesca shared with me her many insights on how fashion and style contour public spaces and play with the boundaries between public and private (Chapter Five and Six).

Last but not least, I want to spend a few words of this introduction to comment on the role of poetry and performativity in regards to public space and in my research. The following text was produced by the participants of the workshop “Building Zenobia” that took place in Casa Loca in January 2005, to introduce its work and the debates it sought to generate (see Chapter Three and
Five). Using the idea and name of Zenobia, a fictive city on stilts described by Italo Calvino in one of his novels (1972), this passage describes some of the conditions and problems of Milan as well as some of the possible understandings of and responses to this situation. Zenobia here stands both for a special place where people can meet to share ideas and start new urban projects, and for a place, disconnected from the ground, to be left behind in order to reappropriate Milan and actively engage with the politics of its spaces.

We arrived to Zenobia after a long journey. We walked through the city in which we were living to get to the ruins of the city in which we were born, and we started to construct the city in which we wanted to live. Although we already inhabited the place where the city emerged, we had never seen it – or rather, it had always been invisible to our eyes. It was our wanting to find a new space to give a form to our desires that allowed us to find, within the very walls of our city, this city within the city. And when Zenobia became visible, its light showed us the shadows that had wrapped our home towns in these years.

So, the journey that brought us to Zenobia showed us, first of all, how the cities that we were coming from were changing. Climbing on the stilts, we understood that light and darkness were changing many times, in just one day, the features of the places of our city. We discovered how multitudes were travelling through and inhabiting our territory, constructing nomadic communities within it; and that the dignity of life, that our mothers and fathers had obtained before us, is now negated to the new inhabitants of the city. (…).

We discovered that where we went, in the evening, to tell our stories or to encounter other journeys, the cranes are already demolishing houses to construct great catwalks. (…). We saw, climbing for the first time on the stilts of Zenobia, that popular housing constructed in the previous decades, thought for families with a same structure, and only one culture, were not only inadequate to host new inhabitants (…) but most of all they were not sufficient. And while thousands of apartments and whole buildings are empty waiting for speculations, and for more exciting economic balances, there are too many people in our city who live in conditions seen as indignant in the periphery of the empire. In our city not only we cannot imagine a house for everyone. The economic interests of a few do not even permit us to guarantee a house for all.
And we discovered finally that in the enormous empty spaces of which is filled our city, men in suits and ties are going around. They twirl their hands in the air, designing new offices, luxury houses, malls and parks, with sophisticated control systems and monitored access. Jets and helicopters land and take off continuously, appetizers parties and obscure competitions are organized, while outside of these enormous dismissed areas thousands of people search a city in which to live, a place in which to desire, a space in which to construct a future.

Arrived at Zenobia, hiding between the structures of abandoned factories, we started to use steel and bamboo to construct houses, to design and plan hallways and balconies, so that we could meet, and to use stilts in order to be always able to see, beyond us, beyond our city, where it was going the city we were coming from.

(…) Every time we plan a house, we travel the stairs in the contrary direction and we return to earth. We descend from Zenobia, to plant another pole that would anchor to reality this dream that we are building. We dig with bare hands and every time we find tales and memories, we find that history, that many hoped to bury by closing the factories. (…) At times surprised, at times flattered, we invite all to climb and to tell us the city that they remember and the city that they imagine for their future. We sit and start to listen to the story of everyone who climbs the stairs of Zenobia, not only so as to find a place for everyone’s desires, but also to change ours and let them continue to live. (CopyRiot, ActionMilano, and Officina di Architettura, 2005)

I presented this quote here because it is easy to discount this very poetic and allegorical description as being too literary or vague to accurately tell us what is going on in the city. Yet I believe that this passage describes, in a very poignant and illuminating way, some of the struggles and dilemmas of spaces and identities in Milan, and some of the workings of power in the city. While portraying some of the key issues of contemporary Milan, this text brilliantly evokes the past and the present, and dreams of possible future. It thus works as a perfect introduction for a dissertation that seeks to analyze public space in a metropolis which has experienced huge changes in the past fifty years and in which many people seek to construct a different urban community.
The poetic expression of Zenobia, moreover, is not unique. On the opposite, during my research I was struck by how often I encountered poetry as a way to describe and comment on public spaces by many different people. Examples include the words of Don Felice, the narration of Mohamed Ba, and the manifesto of VivereMilano. Because these people suggested that poesis was a necessary tool to talk about some aspects of Milan, I do not regard it as a secondary or disposable expression of people’s relationship with public space. Instead, I see it as drawing attention to the fact that public space is also a very sensual and affective part of people’s relations with the city. It is interesting in this respect the contrast I found between many sociological descriptions and analyses of Social Centers and the energy and atmosphere of the places I visited. This disjunction indeed emerges in the very literature itself, as a discomfort shared by many authors with pinning down intellectually such a lively and diverse movement. Quagliata, for example, shares his concern that the words of commentators - including his own, and be they media or scholars, sympathizers or foes - always dehumanizes those who are called and call themselves “(political) collective subjects” (Quagliata, 1994: 76). Behind that label, however, there is life:

But who the hell are you, what are you up to, how do you live, do you have kids, the smallest one has a fever, you go by bus, do you play card, are you tired, do you have a council housing, you don’t know what to say, you are fat, you like driving through country roads, perhaps with a friend, and this thesis, when do you finish it?? But one will say: “this is colour”, and so, let’s leave it. (Quagliata, 1994: 76)
Because of these considerations, in this thesis I tried to give some room to poetic expressions, and to the role of affect, humour, and imagination in talks and practices related to public space. With 'affect' here I do not intend an esoteric feeling contained in people's heads and minds. Rather, following Mankekar (1999) I remind myself that emotions are also important social constructions. I found affect, imagination, humor, and poetry particularly important in the walks with Mohamed Ba and Don Felice. The meeting of VivereMilano also used a metaphorical language, passion, and laughter to reflect and act upon Milan. In presenting VivereMilano's meeting and the itinerary of Mohamed Ba, then, I found a performative approach particularly useful. In Chapter Two and Seven I deploy a theatrical form to represent people's words. This includes giving stage directions, indicating the tone of voice of those who speak, and describing the sounds and settings that are part of the situation (I discuss this all in more detail in Chapter Seven). As I argue in the last part of my thesis, this helps us pay attention to people's creativity in their approach to the city and its public spaces.
CHAPTER ONE: MILAN

Milan is an old city. It was founded in the fourth century B.C. as a Celtic settlement, and became Roman about 100 years later. From that period on, the city and its region saw many different regimes, including the one of French, Spanish, and Austrian rulers, until it became part of a united Italy in the middle of the 19th century. Because of its location in the middle of the fertile Po River plain, Milan has not only profited from a rich agricultural production in its immediate region, but has always been an important crossroad for trading routes in Italy and Europe. This has not only been vital in the past: today, its middle position also facilitates its role in the international fashion market.

In regards to its urban structure, Milan has a circular, spiralling shape. At its centre are older neighbourhoods - mostly (re)built in the 19th century, but some significantly older than that - and an intricate network of small streets and plazas combined with more recent and larger ones. The historic centre also contains prestigious buildings such as the Duomo cathedral, the Sforza Castle, the Scala theatre, the Royal Palace, and many more. In this very central ring we find the majority of the largest and symbolically most important public spaces of Milan (excluding parks). If we were to take a tour through some of these, we might start from the extensive Duomo Plaza, visit the wide promenading routes of Corso Vittorio Emanuele and the Galleria, reach the very central San Babila and
Scala Plazas, and see several medium sized plazas such as Piazza Fontana, Piazza Santo Stefano, Missori, and Largo Augusto.

The Duomo Plaza, symbolic centre of the city, is reserved for pedestrian traffic and is a nodal point for two of the three subway lines. From it depart several streets (parts of which are pedestrian only) to reach the Sforza Castle with its open courtyards and its adjacent park. The Duomo Plaza is also very often the place where people congregate for rallies and demonstrations. Among the notable shops that open onto this plaza is the almost century old Rinascente department store. Although this is, of course, a private establishment, it works for many people as a public space. The Rinascente offers warm and dry refuge in cold days, has washrooms (a fact not to be underestimated in a city that does not generally offer public restroom facilities), and the sitting area in its third floor is indeed a hang-out place for many people, especially elderly, who seem not to have many other places to go to or things to do.

The covered passageway Galleria Vittorio Emanuele links the Duomo with the Scala Plaza. The Galleria is an old, well established promenading route and is flanked by expensive shops and cafes, although a very heterogeneous crowd of people moves through it. The Scala Plaza it leads to, where the world-recknowned theatre is located, is often also the place where small groups of demonstrators gather, as it hosts the Marino Palace that it is the headquarter of the municipal councillors. Walking away from the Duomo Plaza in yet a different direction, we could find ourselves in Corso Vittorio Emanuele, another pedestrian promenading avenue that reaches San Babila, a large Plaza contoured by big
clothing stores where people meet, hang out, and/or walk glancing at shops. These central areas also include more exclusive, high-end fashion streets, such as Via Spiga and Via Manzoni, that attract a less diverse public than do the places I described above. Although the streets and plazas of the historic centre are clearly not the only significant public spaces of Milan, they are symbolically and geographically at the heart of the city. It is interesting to note in this context that all of the participants in this research who guided me for city walks brought me to these central neighbourhoods.
As with most other Italian cities, Milan’s centre was surrounded by walls which opened through several gates. Some of the latter are still visible today and, as several of my interlocutors pointed out, they serve as important reference points for many of its inhabitants. Another important feature of the city has been its canals, called Navigli. These waterways circled and crossed Milan providing a way to transport goods into the city until the 1930s, when most of them were covered and converted to streets. Leonardo da Vinci himself, who lived and worked in the city, designed a system of lift-locks to make it possible for boats to navigate on these canals. The Ticinese - Porta Genova neighbourhood located on some of the remaining waterways is a very popular gathering place especially at night, due to its pleasant walk by the river in summertime, and to its many bars, restaurants and cafes.

In contemporary times, the city of Milan is home to 1.4 million people, and together with its greater metropolitan region, it counts about 4 million inhabitants (data taken from Aalbers, 2007). One of its peculiarity, however, is that its population more than doubles during the day — due to the very large number of commuters. The architect and expert in urban planning Paola Rottola, one of the people I met in Milan, estimates that the number of people who inhabit Milan during the day reaches over four millions. According to Martinotti (2003), this phenomenon brings particular challenges to Milan, as city residents and city users generally have different needs, use different services and resources, and occupy a different administrative place in the city (for example, in relation to taxes).
The disparity between inhabitants and commuters is a witness to the fact that the very high cost of housing has been displacing large part of the Milanese population outside of its municipal borders (see Zajczyk, 2005). The average rental price in Milan, for example, is roughly a third higher than the combined average of the eleven major cities in Italy (Benassi, 2005: 24). The general high cost of housing, be it rented or owned, has been exacerbated by the gentrification of many areas and by the tertiary industry occupying many buildings of the centre. Reflecting on this situation, an article in the *Corriere della Sera* (one of Italy’s leading newspaper) decries that in the next two decades Milan will lose another 300 thousands residents (Soglio, 2005).

Moreover, the concurrent emptying of the city, Milan’s very low birth rate, and a high life expectancy especially for women will render Milan even “older” than now (in 2005, according to Soglio, 182 Milanese celebrated their hundredth birthday; and one of my interviewees recently turned 107!). In fact, while many new families and younger people settle outside of the municipal borders due to the price of accommodation, many of Milan’s seniors remain in the city where they often own a home or rent an apartment in social housing (Zajczyk, 2005). As Soglio writes: “a child every six grandparents, and a senior for every three inhabitants. Milan ages and becomes empty” (Soglio, 2005).

The great number of commuters to the city is also more generally indicative of its productive role in Northern Italy. Milan serves as the capital of the Lombardia region and is one of the central economic motors of the country. Together with fashion and design, it is also an important centre for finance,
publishing, and advertising. As Andreotti and others write, Milan has a "concentration of high-level jobs", a "production system [that] is extremely vital" (Andreotti et al. 2000, quoted in Aalbers 2007: 186), a very low unemployment rate, and the highest per-capita income in Italy. It is thus described as a "rich" metropolis, although, as I will discuss below, this prosperity might not be benefiting everyone in the same ways.

Milan is also the most cosmopolitan city in Italy. Its dense fabric of multi-storied, mixed-use buildings is always bustling with activity, and the city has been at the forefront of political, social, and cultural movements in the country for most parts of the last century. As Foot poignantly describes:

All the crucial movements, booms, slumps and moments in twentieth-century Italian history have had their epicentre in Milan. The first trade unions took root in Milan, fascism was made in Milan and the socialist reformists made of Milan the jewel in their crown. The resistance was led from Milan and saw its final act there in 1945. The city was the centre of the economic miracle that transformed Italy (...). The strategy of tension was to begin in a bank in Milan, and the deindustrialization of the 1980s also hit this city first. Milan was the centre of Italy's creative-industrial design revolution in the 1960s. (Foot, 2001: 3)

Another important aspect of Milan's leadership is that it is perhaps the Italian city where international immigration since the end of the 1980s has had the most concentration and effects (Caritas/Migrantes, 2005). The Lombardia region, in fact, where Milan is located, is home to about a quarter of all foreign residents in the country. Half of these immigrants live in the province of Milan itself, thus making Milan one of the most multicultural urban communities in Italy. As Mauri, Cologna, Granata, and Novak (2003) write, non-Italians account for more than 10% of all Milaneses, with the percentage of foreign residents in Italy being 3.8%
According to Caritas/Migrantes, at the end of 2004, there were about 143 thousands foreign residents registered in the municipality of Milan. They come primarily from Asia (35.9%), followed by Africa (23.1%) the Americas (22.4%) and Europe (18.6%) (Caritas/Migrantes, 2005: 337 ff). In terms of nationality, the largest immigrant communities in Milan are the Filipino, Egyptian, Peruvian, Chinese, and Ecuadorian ones (ibid.).

International immigration to Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to Caritas/Migrantes, immigrants were not even counted before 1970, and in that year they were only 140,000. Because the numbers of foreign residents in Italy have grown about 20-fold in 30 years, their high concentration in Milan has meant that it had quite a noticeable impact for its residents. Although the scholarly literature point out that immigrants as a group are better educated than Italians (Caritas/Migrantes, 2005) and that they are absolutely necessary to the economy of the region – not to mention the cultural, religious, and social richness they bring – racism and discrimination are widespread in Italy and in Milan. According to the Caritas/Migrantes, about half of working immigrants in the country encounter forms of discrimination at work, and several surveys indicate that a significant number of Italians perceive immigrants as a problematic aspect of contemporary society. In Milan, one of the factors that might have strengthened this perception of newcomers is that foreign immigration to the city has happened roughly at the same time as the difficult process of tertialization.

As Foot’s words above indicate, in the past sixty years Milan underwent significant changes. One of these has been a rapid industrialization in the post
war years, and the de-industrialization of the city a few decades later. In the 1950s Milan experienced a "miracle": a boom of economic and industrial growth which was supposed to usher Italy into full modernity (Ginsborg, 2003; Foot, 2001). Amid the optimism, immigrants from the South as well as from nearby regions settled in the new peripheries of the city. According to Foot, the "miracle" had a strong impact on all aspects of society, in Milan and beyond. He writes:

Television became a permanent fixture in Italian homes. Cars replaced the scooters that had replaced bicycles. Migration brought together populations, dialects, lifestyles and customs. (...). Rice pickers were replaced by machines. Beaches filled with holidaymakers. Traffic jams became a feature of everyday life. (Foot, 2001: 19)

The "miracle", however, was short lived. Starting in the 1970s, the industries were closing, leaving huge abandoned areas in the fabric of the city. Mudu estimates that “[b]y the late 1990s, industrial property across a total area of 7 million sq m had been vacated in Milan alone, not to speak of peripheral municipalities such as Sesto San Giovanni, where closures affected a total of over 3 million sq m” (Mudu, 2004: 921, referring to Censis 2002). As I discuss in Chapter Five, these so called dismissed areas (aree dismesse), are not just vast empty spaces. Some of them are becoming the ground for new urban developments aimed at improving Milan’s image in Europe. The area Bicocca, that I discuss in Chapter Three, is an example. For the other, they often become crucial objects of debates, conflicts, and imaginaries in the city. At times used as precarious homes by immigrants, at times “occupied” by oppositional groups, and at times revamped as monuments or exposition on the post-modern, post-industrial world, they are in a sense a city within a city. While standing as a
reminder of a difficult process of economic and social change, they are also seen by some as places from where new urban realities could emerge.

Following the “miracle” and leading to the time of deindustrialization, a very important period for the history of the city, and one which keeps re-emerging in the collective memory of Milan, has been the years of social tension and struggles in the 70s. Starting from 1967, university students and then factory workers were engaged in concerted actions against the dominant institutions. Many leftwing associations and oppositional groups were started, some of which occupied buildings to protest inequality in the city. According to Ginsburg, moreover, 40% of families inhabiting social housing in Milan refused to pay their rents in 1968-70 (Ginsborg, 2003: 324). In response to the protests and unrests, a bomb was planted in the very central Fontana Plaza (see also Chapter Seven) in December 1969. The massacre initiated what has been called the “strategy of tension”, a series of bombs and killings presumably by rightwing forces but designed to set the blame onto anarchist and communist groups (see Ginsborg, 2003: 333ff for a more detailed history of these years).

Starting in the seventies, Milan de-industrialized and switched to a tertiary economy. In this process, design and fashion slowly became two of the most important industries in town. As Foot describes it, “Armani, Prada and Versace replaced Falck, Breda and Pirelli [once the biggest industries] as the economic bosses of the city” (Foot, 2001: 3). The success of this industry, as Yanagisako (2002) and Crane and Bovone (2006) analyze, resulted from the combination of several factors: a well consolidated, artisan textile production in the Northern
area of Milan, a longstanding cultural attention to aesthetics, the presence of independent designers in the region, and Milan's strategic position in relation to European and Italian markets. The sheer economic power of the fashion industry and its alliance with the political scene resulted in Milan becoming "one vast fashion hall" (Foot, 2001:134).

The centre of Milan, for example, has been largely taken over by the fashion industry, thereby squeezing out other businesses, as well as reducing the number of available residential buildings. The weight of fashion - in its various aspects, such as showrooms, advertising, distribution, retailing, and communication - on the city is particularly evident during the two Fashion Weeks that happen every year. The annual furniture and design exposition Salone del Mobile, is another event which places style (this time regarding architecture instead of clothing) as a protagonist of the urban scene. One of the effects of this hegemony on the urban scene is that, especially in the centre, public space is often contoured and/or framed by shops and images focusing on beauty and aesthetic. I will discuss how this might impact the visual life of public spaces in the second part of this work.

The shift to the service industry in the city also contributed to a change in employment structure. With the closing of the factories in the period between the 1970s and the 1990s, job safety has decreased. Although Milan has a very low unemployment rate, this can easily hide the fact that many workers face difficult, temporary, and marginalized labour conditions. In Milan today a growing number of people are casual, "atypical" workers who do not have proper work contracts.
This includes many young persons employed part time, many immigrants in the service industry, and also many workers in the fashion industry. Andreotti, in a research on social exclusion in Milan, describes what this can look like for less privileged groups:

Milanese single mothers are not excluded from the labour market; it is more a case of exclusion on the labour market (Morris, 1995), since these women systematically occupy the lowest positions on the employment ladder — a fact related more to inequality (difficult access to educational qualifications for people with poor resources) — and are concentrated in a specific sector, cleaning work, which offers little job security. (Andreotti, 2006: 332)

Foreign immigrants are, according to Andreotti, in a similar situation. They also often occupy the lower, and precarious end of the job force, and their being employed often conceals treacherous patterns of impoverishment. Indeed, the currently dynamic labour market has allowed immigrants and young single mothers to mask the actual poverty of public assistance and its weakness. When the market enters a phase of recession or stagnation, [they] (...) are the first to suffer from the crisis and to be expelled from the market, since they do not possess any professional qualifications that would allow them to enter into other kinds of work. Moreover, they often lack any real unemployment insurance coverage, since they are not ‘on the books’. The low salaries in these jobs do not allow them to save money, so that they find themselves virtually in a condition of poverty at the first sign of an emergency. (Andreotti, 2006: 342-343)

The precarious working conditions rising in the city were one of the aspects feeding the emergent sense of crisis that I could notice during my fieldwork. As the print media and almost all of the people I met kept recounting, housing has become very expensive and hard to find, the middle classes are running out of savings, immigrants are facing economic hardships and discrimination, and more and more people, especially elderly women, are becoming impoverished. In
stores, at the market, and in the indoor municipal playground my son and I visited, people constantly complained about the price of living, and reminded everyone how the conversion in 2002 of the Lira, the old Italian currency, to the Euro, has resulted in a significant increase in the cost of living. Several circulating stories told about elderly people on very meagre pensions who had to resort to eating animal food. Media reports described with alarm how more and more people bought food on credit, and how the low-cost markets were becoming increasingly popular. And in a city known for its elegance and textile production, on three occasions in a six months period a person died trapped in a charity collection bin as they tried to collect some used clothes from it.

These tragic stories find an echo in the sociology literature. Although Milan is a rich city, Andreotti (2006) points out that the poverty level is close to the national average, thus showing that income inequality in Milan is more marked than in other Italian cities. Zajczyk and Cavalca (2006) describe the feminization of poverty in the city, with single mothers and elderly women living alone being particularly at risk. The latter group, for example, makes up about a third of the people in poverty, although they only count for 23,5 % of the population (Benassi, 2005) – a fact due both to women’s longevity and their lesser participation in the workforce during their life. Welfare structures and social assistance, moreover, are scarce and temporary. Andreotti writes that “income support measures seem to be conceived for a population perceived as being either in a short spell of bad luck, or too marginal and beyond hope to deserve sustained effort” (Andreotti, 2006: 330).
As she points out, this leaves a large role for charitable associations and non-governmental organizations to play in this sector. The Catholic church in particular is an important source of assistance for many people. The many churches in Milan offer shelters and hot food, programs for children and youth, counselling, networking, medical care, as well as spaces for recreation and socializing. They are also more or less loosely connected to other, secular organizations such as Terre di Mezzo, Naga, and Amici di Gastone, who are active in informing the general public about poverty, social exclusion, and the rights of migrants. As some of the workers of Terre di Mezzo points out, this has both a negative side – the lack of public, consistent, and concerted programs with no strings attached – and a positive one - the existence of many active, innovative organizations working on issues of poverty and social justice and the involvement and direct mobilization of many volunteers in them.

At the same time as the crisis loomed large over at least some of its inhabitants, however, Milan was involved in a number of “big projects”, which caused the newspaper Corriere della Sera, the municipality, and others to talk about a new Renaissance for the city. The following map and description by Paola Rottola, who works both with the Department of Architecture at the University of Milan and with the municipal energy company, can serve as a way to summarize some of the characteristics of these recent developments.
Paola’s map traces some of the recent and concluded urban development: the external Fiera (exposition and convention centre), Bicocca Tecnocity, a project on the ex OM (a tank and trucks factory), and one on the ex Innocenti. Among the planned, future, projects Paola describes Santa Giulia, the European Library, the Southern Agrarian Park, Bovisa, Quarto Oggiaro, the internal Fiera, and the proposed Fashion City located very close to the Centre (I will discuss this area in Chapter Five). Except for the Fiera, the Agrarian Park, and the European Library, the projects mapped by Paola are mostly meant to create new residences, accompanied by green spaces, and in some cases by new infrastructure and/or facilities, such as shopping malls, theatres, and/or university buildings. The
External *Fiera*, that was inaugurated in 2005, is according to Paola “the biggest exposition fairground in Europe”. Moreover, as the expositive functions and structures are moving there, away from the previously existing, internal *Fiera*, the latter is also the object of a future restructuring. This project, whose completion is planned by 2008, will mostly create new residences.

An important feature of these developments is that most of them take the place of industrial dismissed areas: Santa Giulia on the ex Redaelli and Montedison, Bicocca on the old Pirelli, and the Bovisa in Sesto San Giovanni on the vacant lots of Falck. Paola’s map shows that the dismissed areas represent an incredible resource for the city. Foot writes in this context: “[t]he fifteen million square metres of aree dismesse are where the topology and morphology of the city’s (...) urban space will be [and is being] rewritten” (Foot, 2001: 173, referring to *Progetto Bicocca*, 1998). As a precious resource, however, dismissed areas inevitably generate conflicting views on how emerging new urban spaces and resources should be used (see Chapter Five). Because the new residences that are being built on them tend to be prestigious and expensive, they will likely contribute to the current flight from the city by less privileged inhabitants of Milan. Parts of the dismissed areas, moreover, once redesigned and reconstructed, will become new public spaces: streets, plazas, parks, and pedestrian areas. The very ways in which they are redeveloped, however, will have significant effects on who will be circulating in these spaces, who will be welcomed in them, and the dynamics and power relations that will be reflected in this terrain.
The research by Aalbers on the tremendous yet uneven development of the mortgage market in Milan can help us understand the striking contrast between stories of hardship, and a booming urban renewal. As Aalbers describes, from the late 1990s there has been a growing interest and investment in the housing market - what he calls a switch to the secondary market from the primary one of industry and manufacturing. This was due in part to sweeping reforms in mortgage law and structures, and to a general recession taking place in Italy, which made it more profitable to invest in real estate than in other venues. In Milan currently

real estate is seen as a good investment, and it is increasingly realized that ownership of real estate holds a key to future income generation and (as was traditionally well realized in Italy) to security. While there is a general sense of economic depression, real estate is seen as a safe haven. (Aalbers, 2007: 185)

The investment in real estate has accelerated urban renewal, making Milan’s “larger metropolitan area (…) perhaps the most dynamic one in Italy” (Aalbers, 2007: 178). The existence of large areas vacated by closed factories facilitates this process in the whole metropolitan area. Zajczyk (2005) writes that in two of the three big concentric circles that make up the municipality of Milan, gentrification has been completed and has resulted in the displacement of a large part of lower income inhabitants. As Aalbers discusses, the dynamism of the Milanese real estate market has generally rendered housing less affordable for Milanese residents:

due to the much faster rise in housing prices than income, people need to borrow more to buy a house, displaying the relation between rising prices and higher demand typical of the sector (…) [Also], because the rental market continues to offer fewer
alternatives, there is a higher demand for mortgage loans, also among groups that traditionally favored renting or were forced to rent due to market constraints. (Aalbers, 2007: 185)

According to Aalbers, this has resulted in individuals and families paying more for housing, and incurring greater risks than before, as they are forced to take greater loans to pay for houses. As far as rental accommodations are concerned, the choice has always been very limited. Milan has a very high percentage of homeownership, due to several reasons. First, laws have made owning a house very advantageous and at the same time posed very strict conditions on renting one to tenants. In particular, some reforms in the past forty years which were implemented as a way to ensure affordable rents, have had very unfortunate results, such as an increased evictions of tenants. This has meant that private-rented housing has become much more expensive while the small stock that remained rent controlled became frozen (extremely low out-migration) and virtually inaccessible (...). Meanwhile, the social rented housing stock has received little investment, and is aimed at satisfying the need of only poor households. (Aalbers, 2007: 182)

Intergenerational transfers of real estate plays an important role in this equation. Young families are often, if possible, helped by their parents in attaining a home. Coupled with the general lack of rental houses in Milan, this makes the disparity between more and less advantaged sectors of the population even more pronounced. In the words of Aalbers, in this context "housing also deepens and structures existing social and economic inequalities" (Aalbers, 2007: 184).

Immigrants are among those who have the hardest time finding affordable and appropriate housing. This is not only because they as a group have less income than Italians (see Caritas/Migrantes, 2005) but also because of
discrimination from house owners. Indeed, Caritas/Migrantes estimate that more than 60% of foreign residents in metropolitan Milan live in either overcrowded or precarious/temporary accommodations. Even more dramatic is the report of Naga, a voluntary medical street patrol, that found many groups of immigrants of different nationalities living inside empty factory buildings in industrial dismissed areas, without any basic services (Osservatori Naga, 2003). Although many immigrants do obtain social housing, because this resource is very limited in the city, it does not significantly improve the situation.

An interesting characteristic of Milan pointed out by several scholars (for example Aalbers, 2007; Andreotti, 2006; Zajczyk, 2005) is that generally in this city very different social realities exist side by side rather than being spatially segregated. This regards richness and poverty as well as the presence of Italian and foreign immigrants. For the latter aspect, Aalbers points out that although in some areas, and at certain times, there has been a visible presence of immigrants’ residences, services, and businesses, there is today hardly a neighbourhood with a significant concentration of immigrants. An exception to this is the so-called Chinatown, where there have been recently a series of strong conflicts between the police, some Chinese Milanese, and some Italian residents.

The inner rings of the city, built mainly in the 19th century, are generally considered more expensive and exclusive; conversely, the periphery hosts a few areas which are far less desirable to live in (Aalbers, 2007). Even so, however, Milan has no place that is a remarkably poorer neighbourhood, and most of its
areas consist of a mix of residents from different socio-economic conditions. In other words, there are many locations where poverty levels are higher than the average, but they are very small and are present, dot-like, everywhere in the city. Zajczyk writes, for example, that even in the two more central rings of the city well-off, or even very well-off families, living in accommodations that are architecturally very valuable, or have been restructured according to significantly modern and prestigious standard, co-inhabit [a neighbourhood] with pockets of seniors or of subordinate workers, or even with enclaves of old (in the west) or recent (in the North east) (...) immigration. (Zajczyk, 2005: 59)

The comparison between objective and relative poverty rates in Zajczyk’s study shows that several processes at work in these social micro-geographies can effect and are effected by public spaces. The author suggests for example that in consolidated neighbourhoods, which have not been reorganized during recent developments, poverty is perceived less dramatically than in some other areas. This is due to the fact that rents have remained slightly more affordable. Another reason, however, is that people can use and depend on familiar and consistent neighbourhood spaces. This brings Zajczyk to write that subjective poverty is “sensible most of all to the relation that individuals have with the lived, perceived, daily-life space” (Zajczyk, 2005: 71).

Conversely, conditions of poverty seem even more insurmountable in degraded urban territories, which do not offer adequate structures, services and public spaces. If spaces effect one’s perception of poverty, social microprocesses linked with housing also shape interaction in public spaces. An interesting case in this context is how in some neighbourhoods a micro spatial segregation can occur when young immigrant families accept social housing that
no Italian family would accept. According to Zajczyk, in these cases, tension between social groups pervade public spaces in the neighbourhood – especially where there are also many elderly residents, who are particularly rooted in an area and thus perceive the newcomers “not only as intruders but as dangerous” (Zajczyk, 2005: 76).

Because of the co-existence of very different realities and social situations in a dense terrain, we could say that in Milan public space is where diversity becomes particularly visible. This can help explain why the central public spaces, and the Duomo Plaza in particular, are quite contested locales (see also Moroni’s analysis, in Chapter Three). They are in fact both traditionally the realm of more privileged sectors of the population, and, in a sense, the places where people who are economically barred from living in the city can participate in it. The Duomo Plaza, for example, sees in the weekend a strong presence of immigrants and of people from the metropolitan hinterland, while it is often avoided by middle class Italian residents of Milan. As I describe in the next three chapters, while different social groups continue to share these spaces, each of their presences does, in a sense, interpellate different claims, histories, and representations of these locales, shaping the dynamic layers and interconnected meanings of public space.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to give some more attention to the political climate of contemporary Milan. One of the landmark political events in the 1990s has been the discovery of the extensive system of bribes that had been sustaining the majority of the political élite. The Tangentopoli (bribes-town)
scandal, that erupted in Milan in 1992 but then spread to many other locations in Italy, had important consequences for the city. As Foot describes, it challenged the reputation of Milan as a “moral capital” (Foot, 2001: 169), funded on industriousness and creative innovation. At the same time, for many people, the bribes inquiry showed that only Milan, of all Italian cities, could have played the important role of denouncing dishonesty and to ‘expose the truth’ (see ibid.).

The scandal also ended the long time of rule by the Socialists and the Christian Democrats which had marked Milan from the seventies. In its place, the secessionist Northern League came into power, with an anti-immigrant stance, a disdain for the movement of the Milanese Social Centers, and a focus on reorganizing the government (see Foot, 2001). Starting from the time of the Northern League, the Milanese municipality has been dominated by the right and centre-right coalitions (with arguably no overwhelming change in the matter of endemic corruption; see also Guano, 2008). Berlusconi in particular has been very influential in Milan, both as a very wealthy businessman - who has built entire neighbourhoods in the city and who controls much of the media - and as the political leader of Forza Italia, a party that Foot describes as a “post-modern populism” using “the most sophisticated modern techniques of marketing and advertising to transmit its messages” (Foot, 2001: 183). In this last decade, as Guano3 points out, Milan could indeed qualify as “the city” of Berlusconi. It is here that he has built a great part of his financial empire, and it is from Milan that he has launched “the first post-political movement to take power in Europe” (Foot, 2001: 183).
The dominance of the right and the concurrent a-political stance by Berlusconi’s leadership, the strength of the working class until the seventies and the post-industrialization that displaced it almost overnight, constitute a very complex and interesting conjuncture. In relation to everyday public spaces, right and left wing forces are very much alive in the plazas and streets of the city. They emerge in places replete with historical memories (like Piazza Fontana); through rallies, the recurrent burning of political kiosks, and occasional street violence; and through graffiti, signs and placards (see Chapter Seven). Many of these stories and struggles speak of the working class, of unions, of neo-fascism, and of the continuing relevance of the legacies of Mussolini and the resistance.

At the same time, as Jacopo, an activist of one of the Social Centers points out, the great changes which have made Milan into a model post-industrial city (Aalbers, 2007; Foot, 2001) might require us to think through different terms, pursue different rights, and create new alliances (see Chapter Three).

These complex political conjunctures are also visible in the efforts of the Social Centers, whose very existence in Milan has spanned the historic alliance between students, unions and workers, as well as contemporary struggles around women’s and immigrant rights, globalization, and the precariousness of life in Milan (see Chapter Three and Five). They are also the background for the movement Viveremilano, that I describe in the next chapter, which subtly (and seemingly un-self-consciously) echoes Berlusconi’s a-politics in order to keep a distance from the government and all political parties. Last but not least, discourses on culture, Milanese/Italian identity, and immigration are often an
important arena of conflicts between the right and the left, without changing the fact that Milanese residents who are non-Italian citizens are effectively barred from political participation.
CHAPTER TWO: THE COLOUR OF PUBLIC SPACE

At the end of December 2004, the Corriere della Sera, one of Italy’s leading newspapers, published a letter by Cesare Fracca, a professional man in his late thirties (Schiavi, 2004). In his writing, Fracca lamented the poor quality of life in Milan. He also encouraged other people of his generation who, like him, had always been disinterested in the problems of their city, to wake up, and to do something about the deplorable urban situation at hand. The publication of this letter provoked a landslide of responses by people whose experience of Milan resonated with Fracca’s. With the support of the newspaper (particularly of the editorial section which focuses on Milanese news) Fracca and his correspondents started a blog - an internet site where people could post articles, comments, and letters on the city and its problems, and devise possible solutions. VivereMilano quickly expanded as more and more people visited, read, and wrote on the site, and by the end of January 2005 it already counted approximately three hundred registered members (that is, people who joined the mailing list by providing their email address), and more than 8000 website hits (S. Rav, 2005). In this process (and up to the present), Fracca continued to play an important role, as one of its most avid bloggers, informal leader, and organizer.

VivereMilano, however, is not only a virtual organization. Although it is primarily an internet site and a digital discussion tool about the city of Milan, it is
also a network of people who meet face to face to organize and carry out concrete projects in the city. Indeed, one of its interesting aspects is the way in which it spans both virtual and “real” urban spaces. Firstly, the blog functions as a way to put people in contact with each other and to initiate the creation of subgroups that can, for example, attend city hall meetings, obtain information from particular offices and associations, or meet neighbourhood representatives and committees. In this respect, the internet is a unique tool also/exactly because it expands beyond particular locales. As a virtual plaza, it can assemble people who live all over the city and whose busy schedules might not otherwise allow them to talk and listen to each other. This position of the internet as, so-to-speak, external to place also works well with the vision of VivereMilano as a movement who wants to address the city as a whole with all of its issues, instead of focusing on single neighbourhoods or problems. Once people become readers/bloggers, they can respond to other’s invitations to go to particular meetings and events, and/or decide to join or form an interest group. More active circles - and the ones that can also influence the direction of the association - are then composed of people who are both frequent readers/bloggers, and who succeed (or are interested) in using the internet to ‘cross over to the city’: to establish relationships that bring them to be active in particular places with other “real” persons.

Secondly, as an emerging movement, VivereMilano uses the internet to make its presence visible in public space. An interesting way it sought to do this was to choose a color for itself: orange. As some of the bloggers suggested, if
the people who are writing and/or reading on the internet site could wear something orange when they are in the city (for example in plazas, streets, open markets and public transportation), they might be able to recognize each other. This would also serve to mark the movement's existence to outsiders. Here I want to note that the internet takes the form of an invisible domain, versus public space as a medium for people, projects and ideas to become visible to others. This difference, however, emerges not as a contrast, but rather as an on-going movement between the two (see also Chapter Five for a longer discussion on the complexity of vision). To say it simply, the virtuality of the internet, and its distance from the ordinary public spaces of the city, made VivereMilano possible in the first place. At the same time, only by engaging with, acting in, and making itself present in 'real', physical Milanese spaces and neighbourhoods could the association try to realize its ideas and thus continue to live.

In January 2005, VivereMilano called for an open meeting in one of the most prominent public spaces of the centre: the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. The meeting took place on January 23, on a cold Sunday morning. Open to passersby and to anyone who would bother listening and/or talking, it took a strongly informal form. About 130 people congregated in a circle for approximately two hours, and people expressed opinions and questions without loudspeakers, microphones, or a podium. People also circulated on the rim of the circle, meeting each other, conversing with strangers and with people they already knew, and engaging curious passersby. A manifesto of the movement had been prepared by Fracca and a small committee which had met some time
earlier (the first one of those more active nuclei that I refer to above), and it was handed out to anyone who would care to take it.

In this chapter, I focus my discussion on this first public meeting, because it highlights some of the characteristics and dilemmas of public space in Milan. In particular, I find very interesting the way in which VivereMilano made itself present in public space. I am intrigued by how the movement evoked the ideal of public space as an arena of debate and of confrontation, all while closing off and pushing to the margins certain topics and avenues of conversation. The forum in fact brought up many problems and aspects of daily life in the city, including air pollution, traffic, public transit, the price of houses, the role of the municipal government, and more. As interesting as what the participants say however, is what their comments do not consider, such as the issues and difficulties encountered by poorer residents, by people of color, and/or by immigrants. The way in which this group brings, literally, certain topics and certain exclusions into public space, can offer us a perspective on some of the dynamics and complexities of public space in Milan, and can help us reflect on who might be able to claim a legitimate presence in city spaces.

While, as I argue in this chapter, the participants of VivereMilano are in a privileged position when it comes to using public space, this should not blind us to how, as a group, they might also be in a tricky situation in some other respects. As one of the politicians who attended the meeting pointed out, their generation (the cohort of 30/40 years old) is significantly affected by the increase of precarious working conditions and the decrease of social and economic
securities. And while 30/40 years old have a very low poverty rate compared to other age groups (Benassi, 2005), Benassi explains that this is also due to the fact that many thirty years old are still living with their parents, even if employed. In his research, he found that half of the 25 to 34 years old (three quarters of whom were working) had not been able to establish a household of their own. In today’s Milan, writes Benassi, “a good position in the labour force is not enough for the transition to adult life, differently to what happened in the past” (Benassi, 2005: 34). In this context, it is very interesting that none of the participants in the forum responded to the politician’s comment and to his idea that the 30/40 years old are part of a generation in transition.

Here below I present three excerpts from the tape recording of the forum. I quote the discussion at length in an effort to represent as best as possible some of the variety of the themes and the multiple directions of the conversation. As I discuss in the Introduction as well as in Chapter Seven, I use theatrical stage directions to convey to the reader the setting, and some of the tones, movement, and surrounding sounds of the meeting. All of the people’s comments are verbatim, and I present the tones of voice used by the speakers, the interruptions, and the moments of laughter, as accurately as possible. I gave synonyms to speakers in order to make the discussion easier to follow, but would like to remind the reader that most of the people who participated in the meeting did not know each other’s names.

While stage directions are not usually part of ethnographies, several authors including Fabian (1990), and Madison (1999) have used forms inspired
by theatre and performance studies to write academic texts and to discuss social theory. Drawing from their insights, here I wish to work towards a form of ethnographic representation that could help include in our description and analysis of conversations and events the role played by affect, voice, humour, and staging. In the context of this meeting, a performative form is particularly useful, because those aspects were an important part of what the forum was trying to accomplish, and of the way it was, literally, taking place in the space of the Galleria.

Like in Chapter Seven, I wrote myself as one of the characters in the ‘play’. In doing this, I wanted to emphasize that this meeting was listened to and recorded from a particular position, and not from a distant and encompassing vantage point. On the one hand, this means that it is necessarily a partial representation: during the forum I was part of the circle of participants, and I certainly missed some of the comments that were spoken in softer voices or that came from more distant parts of the circle. On the other hand, my position as a participant emphasizes once more the role of my situated and embodied trajectories in the city for crystallizing fleeting moments and encounters into a text and an academically grounded reflection. As I mentioned in the Introduction, my research itself can be seen as an itinerary in city spaces, and my daily, lived engagement with the city as what enabled particular stories, issues, and meanings of public space to emerge.
Setting: A group of people (approximately one hundred) is gathering by one of the big stone pillars of a promenade with arches. The Duomo cathedral and the steps leading to it are visible just behind the promenade. On the pillar, placed higher than the gathering people, is a street sign and a stone inscription. The gathering people are forming a circle and are taking turns talking – sometimes quietly, sometimes very animatedly, with frequent laughter, interruption, and overlap. There is a sense of excitement and celebration among them. It is very cold: many people are rubbing their hands and shifting from foot to foot to keep warm, and there is white breath coming from their mouths. They have hats, mittens, and winter coats on, and almost all of them are wearing something orange (like a scarf, gloves, or a jacket). A young man is wearing an orange full body suit. Many people are chatting on the periphery of the circle. Some others are moving around it, trying to find a good spot from where to listen and see what is going on. Passersby are walking by in all directions. Some join the circle, some continue on. Two people with an orange item of clothing are distributing a
pamphlet with the manifesto of the group. The people assembled in the circle take the paper eagerly, while some of the passersby are interested in it and some are not.

Cristina/the anthropologist approaches the circle, takes the pamphlet and starts to read it. It says:

A new sentiment is circulating in the streets of Milan: it is the spirit, made of passion and awareness, of us awakened citizens. VivereMilano is a spontaneous movement by 30/40 years old who stand up to show that they exist, and that they are not alone in their wanting to design and to build a better city. VivereMilano is a laboratory without prejudices nor alignments, free to develop ideas, projects, and concrete actions, that acts as an (...) amplifier of messages and signals. (...) In our life we have cared very little for “the public thing”: we always preferred that others engaged in politics, because it appeared boring, at first sight tiring, and ineffective. Our strategy has always been the escape: our goal was to work as much as possible, holding our breath for 5 days, in order to re-emerge from the apnea for the brief diversion of the weekend. Today however, something in us is changed, and we realize that the quality of our life and the one of our children is totally influenced by our disinterest. Finally we wake up from our apathy, and we start to talk about dreams, ideals, and concrete possibilities for a better life. We want to start to reflect also with our hearts and our bellies, distancing ourselves from the empty logics which characterize the politics that we saw and we voted until now; we want to untie ourselves from parties and give clear contents to politics, which is today distant from us and little convincing (...) [VivereMilano, 2005]

Cristina/the anthropologist puts the paper in her bag and joins the circle to listen to what the gathering people are saying.

Arturo: (in a nostalgic voice) (...) twenty or thirty years ago [in Milan there were more] relationships, [a feeling of] human belonging ... Milan was not always the same [as it is now]. There was a ... there was a tradition of welcome, of solidarity ... (...). It was a place where there was work (...) It is a city that
welcomed generations of people that arrived, that gave them work, (...) This according to me gave a sense of BELONGING to the city, that now slowly has been lost, lost for thousands of reasons. (...) [Even] La Scala [theatre] (...) once had a different value ... the people who went to La Scala stayed here in the weekend, they met (...) they TALKED about this city, while now they go after their own interests.

(...) 

Ugo: This thing is getting bigger, and is happening also in other cities (...) a movement similar to this was born in Napoli. They have put together the professional associations and they held a conference in [a] (...) theatre of the city (...) A movement is emerging of people who never cared about politics but who have high ideals, (...) who after years of seeing their problems not respected, decide to solve them in the first person. For me, it is the first time not only that I participate in a demonstration, it is also the first time that I speak out (laughs) (...) I believe that this is the important thing: to start from the problems of the city (...) 

Dante: (insistent) I wanted to make my proposal! I wanted to make my proposal!

   Ugo: (interrupting the previous speaker) for the droppings of dogs, for example, how many people do really - 

Dante: (annoyed) I wanted to make my proposal!!!

Several voices start discussing in the background

   Leonardo: Let's not blame the municipality for this [the droppings of dogs]!
Arianna: Can I say something so that I can go to mass since it's 11 o'clock?

Ugo: (interrupting the previous speaker) Go to the 6 o'clock one!

Arianna: I don't know if this is too big a problem, if it is another topic, but the costs of this city, for example the houses -

Gaia: (interrupting the previous speaker; with great emphasis) Oh, great!!

A man starts talking about house prices in the background

Arianna: This is something that really concerns me, buying a house means -

Luisa: (interrupting the previous speaker) draining all blood from your veins [that is: going bankrupt]

Arianna: It is a big problem ... to access a mortgage now I should prostitute myself ...

Gaia: (loudly, emphatically) Well said! Me too! If you want we go together

laughter

Man talking about houses in the background stops speaking

Arianna: (with resignation) Too bad for us, for the 30, 35, 40 years old who want to buy a house ... Just that.

(...)
Ettore: Can I make a proposal of method? Because I believe that if we talk about air pollution we ALL agree, [if we talk about] noise levels, we ALL [agree], [if we talk about] socialization which is lacking, we ALL [agree], otherwise we would not be here. Moreover I would like to point out that we are more than 130, for this I thank you. (…)

Regarding the method: I seem to see two things. The first [focus we could adopt] is this: the bicycles, the droppings of dogs, etc. (…). The second is a different city. According to me, between these two points there is a long journey, but (…) most of all there is our direction, that is not to play municipality two, the municipality for the bicycles, for the droppings of dogs; we have no time nor sensibility to do that (…).

Our concrete perspective (…) could be, first of all, even if banal, finding a physical place that is warm where we can talk, (…) secondly, finding a route that would not be micro nor macro. (…) I will make random examples:
- we could either reflect according to groups of citizens: the seniors, the kids, those who do not have spaces (…)
- the other could be to reflect like persons: persons have (…) a sense of smell, so we do not want to breathe disgusting dirt; a sense of touch, and we do not want to step on [dog’s] excrements,

Antonella: (interjecting) a sense of sight

Ettore: a sense of sight, and we do not want to see monsters, a sense of hearing, and we do not want to hear disco noises all night long, and this [direction] could be, if you want, another way of getting together (…)

II.

First Politician: (…) The first thing that I wanted to say was that I wanted to thank the one who has thought [about this meeting] because the fact that today, in Milan, the Duomo Plaza has returned to be the agora of the city -
that is the place where the citizens meet and discuss the problems of the city - is an important re-conquest of a piece of democracy. (...) There is a further topic which I want to bring up (...), the problem of precarious working conditions, and of work. I think that this generation of 30-40 years old has one more problem than the one of the quality of life, or of housing, etc. It is the one of finding a role, and a social identity despite the difficulty of not finding any more the securities (...) that the generation of our fathers or grandfathers had (...) 

Ugo: And you think that this can be solved at the level of the city?

First Politician: No, absolutely, it cannot be resolved only at the city level. But

Several voices interrupting, discussing

First Politician: Excuse me, I conclude. But (...) [action at the city level] can help look for guarantees and welfare systems that could resolve some of the problems caused by precariat (...)

(...) 

Ugo: (...) Now only 20 days have passed from our birth, but (...) what is giving us enthusiasm is that this participation that is widening, from below, from people who have never done politics (...) could become something more

(...) 

Donato: Excuse me, my name is [Donato] (...), I am 42 years old. I only heard right things/good points. There is one point on which I am perplexed, and that is the one (...) of keeping the distance from the Palace [the site of institutional politics].
Tania: *interrupts the previous speaker* *Exactly!*

Donato: We are different, we are outside of the logics of centre, right .... I understand all this very well, but there is so-to-speak a contradiction ... which I have noticed (...): it is not that the government/administration is assigned to us through a LOTTERY. Then we make a list of things, ... we bring them there, ... and if we were lucky in the lottery [we obtain what we need] (...) [Municipal politics] is a mechanism that has to be kept under control, it is a mechanism by which ... there must be a LINK between 130 people *(laughing)* who meet [in the street] and the ones who go there [the politicians] -

Ugo: *interrupts the previous speaker* Can I say one thing (...) I see that in many years

Donato: *(interrupts his interrupter; very animatedly)* they are not all the SAME, the administrators [city counselors]!! If we have terrible ones it is OUR fault!! It is not that we were unlucky at the lottery!!

(...)

Ugo: Each one of us has voted right, left, centre -

Vera: *(interjects)* without being interested!

Ugo: Without being convinced, being less and less convinced, at times voting against -

Federico: *(interrupts the previous speaker)* So let’s not vote!

Ugo: We go here so that we do not end up there (...) I have never voted really convinced [of my choice], I say ... I vote this because it is the least of the evil
Tommaso: (interrupts) So, listen, if it is like this, I prefer that one like you, in the end, (...) would go himself to do politics (...)

Marco: I believe it is still too early to come to this!

Tonino: We are already making politics ...

Amato: The politics of institutions!

Ugo: But I say, let's not feel guilty if we have elected (...) and we are absolutely not against this [current] administration ... we are against ... let's say we are for an improvement ... the administration, if it has not represented us it is not because we chose the wrong person, but perhaps because we chose the person who ...

Tiziana: (interrupts the previous speaker) (...) has represented other interests much bigger than ours!

Giulia: (interrupts the previous speaker) No, but apart from the interests, s/he has not wanted to listen

(...) 

Marcello: Can I intervene, excuse me? (...) I seem to understand that we could be born as a pressure group, that is outside of politics, yet inside –

Thea: (interrupts the previous speaker) It is like this, it is like this!

Marcello: without a colour [association] which is really political, but we can press for politics to ORIENT itself in a determinate direction (...) because if we enter in the mechanisms of politics, oh no, we are finished. But at the same time it
is necessary to interact clearly with politics, because obviously politics is an instrument that is at the basis of all decisions, of the city, etc. Then there is a thing I would like to say (...): the people who vote, many vote without knowing who they are voting for, (...) they vote simply because they have to, they vote simply because they saw a commercial on TV. But very often they do NOT KNOW really who they are voting for -

Fortunato: (interrupts the previous speaker) Well, now, it is not that ...  

Marcello: (very animatedly) Look, many people are like that, guys, many people are like that

Umberto: (interrupts the previous speaker; annoyed) Who cares, let's talk about problems!!!

Many voices discussing

(...) 

Marcello: (agitated) Democracy! Democracy is when somebody knows what they are going to do! Here there are people who do not know what they are doing! That is the reality!

Many voices discussing animatedly

Marcello: in fact we are here in 130 and we are not even able of -

Umberto: (interrupts the previous speaker; annoyed) we are not doing a debate on the electoral system!!! Let's talk about the problems of the city!! Let's talk about the problems of the city, we are not here to make a system, a new electoral system...
Second Politician: *(talking really rapidly)* (...) You already have a colour, a very beautiful one, and it is orange ....

Giovanni: *(interrupts the previous speaker)* Yes, we chose it exactly because [it does not correspond to any Italian political party colours] –

Second Politician: *(interrupting his interrupter)* And you did well, you did well!! (...) You are a small piece of the energy of civil society, because you identified yourself with the issues of daily life, that is the urban malaise (...) But maintain your autonomy (...) This is the true democracy (...)

(...)

Third Politician: (...) I came here just to listen (...) I want to let you know that the doors of my office are open (...)

III.

Ugo: We want to put together as many people as possible (...) not to compile a list of complaints, but to compile a list of solutions to problems. (...) We talked about children, about pollution, about dogs’ excrements, about graffiti, about public transportation, etc. etc., but perhaps there is something else, I am sure. These are the topics we have woken up around. The intention is to listen to all, (...) and then (...) to propose concrete measures. For this we also need competent persons, I repeat we are persons, we are people like you, who have never been involved in politics (...) I invite lawyers and doctors, we need doctors, to join us, (...) and then to propose solutions (...
Corrado: I want to say something very banal. The most important, and banal, thing is to be able to LIVE the city. We talked about the example of Rome, that, although it has problems (...) that are more serious than the ones of Milan, they [people in Rome] are able to live the city. We escape in the weekend: in the winter to the mountains, in summer to the sea side; the most important thing would be to really live the city ...

(...)

Pierpaolo: It is hard however to promenade in Duomo [square] ... in other cities (...) people go to Piazza Navona [a major plaza in Rome] ... in the weekend I escape to [Tuscany], I do not go promenading in Duomo (...)

(...)

Matteo: Another thing that existed years ago was the courtyard [of buildings] where kids used to play

   Pietro: (interjecting) Now it is a parking lot

Ugo: Now it is no more (...) we would like to propose to reactivate the courtyards,

   Carlo: (interjecting) Certainly

Ugo: where kids, from 3 to 5 pm, can go play, knowing each other in the buildings/condominiums also prevents [situations like] the senior from the third floor dying and [his/her corpse] remaining there for three months
**Alessandro:** Neighbourhood issues ... popular housing, that are abandoned ... the elevators do not work, the seniors have to walk up, ... they are practically abandoned

**Italo:** (while the previous speaker continues in the background) Yes, but .... But we cannot think about all of the problems of the world, guys...

(...)

**Giuseppe:** (...) I do not know statistic data on it, but I personally also feel the problem of precarieta’ [unregulated, temporary, poor working conditions] (...) it is a problem ... also regarding public order and cleanliness. We talked about cleanliness, about dog’s excrements, but I am also annoyed by the people who illegally ... sell, the people who beg ....

**Guido:** (...) I would like to point out a common aspect of all the complaints that have been made (...), that is the STU-PI-DI-TY. That is, we in Milan live in a way that is absolutely stupid! (Starts raising his voice) It is stupid to work eight hours a day like crazy (is almost shouting) to buy a house that costs three times [what it should cost],

*Several people start to applaud*

**Guido:** and as soon as Saturday comes

*End applause*

**Guido:** (shouting) we go away [to go to the countryside, mountains, or seaside] because we cannot live in the city where we bought a house which costs three times [what it should]!!!
Laughter

Many voices: well said!!!

(...)

Mario: the problem is the MENTALITY! That is the problem, is how we live our daily life and manage our commitments ...this is the problem.

Alberto: (interrupting the previous speaker) Yes but -

Mario: For this [reason] this movement must be born, -

Alberto: (same speaker from two lines above; interjecting) we cannot change the mentality of people

Mario: with this intent.

Public space

The forum of VivereMilano exemplifies, and at the same time complicates, scholarly debates about the importance of public space and about some of the dilemmas associated with it. On the one hand, VivereMilano’s act of occupying a central plaza to talk about the problems of the city is a witness to the potential inherent in public spaces and the importance of the latter for participatory democracy. On the other hand, the meeting shows that both spaces and publics are continuously made and negotiated in a dynamic interplay with categories such as class, race, gender, and age, among others. As many scholars have
noted, this means that some publics find it easier than others to claim and use public spaces (see for example Dines 2002).

Mitchell (1995), Caldeira (2000), and Low (2000), among many others, write that public space is a necessary imaginary because it embodies “ideals of openness and accessibility both in the city space and in the polity” (Caldeira, 2000: 298). Public space provides a locus for social encounters through which people can be confronted with “difference without exclusion” (Young, 1990 quoted in Caldeira, 2000: 301). The randomness of social interaction in urban space is particularly important, because it counters most people’s propensity to be comfortable in one’s familiar milieu. In this way, the public life of streets and plazas of modern cities ideally forces people to relate to others on the basis of a common citizenship, participation in society, and equal human rights (cf. Caldeira, 2000: 303). Caldeira, for example, argues that in cities like Sao Paolo where public space is receding and gated residences increasingly separate more privileged from less privileged segments of the population, equality ceases to be a normative ideal of city life. Because public space cannot function any longer as a site of social interaction between differently positioned people, “inequality and separation” become its “organizing values” (ibid.: 303-304).

The notion of public space as ideally open and accessible to everyone, irrespective of gender, race, class, citizenship, age, ability, sexuality, etc. is also important as a mobilizing idea for groups and individuals to gain access to recognition. Public spaces, as material and symbolic locations, allow groups to be seen and to claim a place in society. They work as “spaces for representation”
(Mitchell, 1995: 115), in both a literal, visual sense, and as a tool for accessing the public sphere. This is because, by mirroring the ideal of the public sphere as a democratic, inclusive arena, public space both represents the polity and mediates between civil society and the state (cf. Caldeira, 2000: 302).

These considerations are important for understanding the forum of *Vivere Milano*. The group's work of activating a central public space, in order to debate the problems of the city and to criticize the local government, gave the meeting its particular appeal and strong sense of enthusiasm. The fact that potentially anyone could have joined the group, to talk about his/her concerns, shows that Milanese streets and plazas are, so to speak, there for the taking. They can still work as a locus for social encounter and debate, and as a relatively “unconstrained space within which political movements can organize and expand into wider arenas” (Mitchell, 1995: 115).

This is particularly inspiring also considering how urban public spaces have been increasingly commodified, privatized, and/or “disneyified”. Mitchell, for example, argues that streets, plazas and park are often (re)designed and managed so that they offer entertainment and consumption rather than allowing for “[i]nteractive, discursive politics” (Mitchell, 1995: 119). The current model for public space, argues Mitchell, is creating a “public realm deliberately shaped as theatre (…). Significantly, it is theatre in which a pacified public basks in the grandeur of a carefully orchestrated corporate spectacle” (Crilley 1993, quoted in Mitchell, 1995: 119-120). Mitchell argues that these developments have serious consequences for political participation because the way in which hegemonic
groups and corporate interests organize the spectacle effectively exclude certain
groups and individuals. In a public space “based on desires for security rather
than interaction, for entertainment rather than (perhaps) divisive) politics” (ibid.),
diversity cannot exist as a transformative and challenging force. On the opposite,
it becomes something to be contained, controlled, and managed.

The Galleria itself where VivereMilano met on that cold January morning is
a significant tourist location, and a place of consumption and display (although
not exclusively). Cafes, restaurants, book and clothing stores occupy all of the
ground floors of the buildings, and it is often used as a space for expositions, and
small-scale public performances. Built in 1865, it has traditionally served as a
promenade where “a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of
the city” (Mitchell, 1995: 115). At first sight, then, the informal and interactive
forum of VivereMilano can be seen to infuse the Galleria with a more utopian
sense of public space: an arena of social encounter, which would include
random, and relatively unconstrained interaction. As one of the politicians
present at the meeting pointed out, this can be seen as the recreation and
revaluing of public space as “the agora of the city”.

At the same time, however, the very ease by which VivereMilano could
assemble and constitute an audience in the Galleria questions this very ideal as
well as the supposed accessibility of this urban locale to diverse inhabitants of
the city. It becomes crucial in this respect to ask who was gathering and
constituting the agora, and why. As the excerpt above shows, the topics
discussed in the forum ranged widely, from issues about traffic and mobility, to
(the lack of) feelings of pride and love towards Milan, to specific problems, events, and regulations (such as most condominium’s rules prohibiting children to play in courtyards). One of the major concerns voiced by the participants - and, in a way, serving to unify the group - was the quality of urban life, and more specifically, the quality of the city as a sensory environment. As one of the participants put it, we

have a sense of smell, so we do not want to breathe disgusting dirt;

a sense of touch, and we do not want to step on [dog’s]
excrements, (...) a sense of sight, and we do not want to see
monsters, a sense of hearing, and we do not want to hear disco
noises all night long.

Indeed, both in the webpage and in the meeting, the cleanliness of city places, urban decor, graffiti, and air pollution were among the most importantly debated topics. Air pollution in particular was a major concern during the meeting. This is hardly surprising, considering that at the time pollutants in the air continuously surpassed the European Union’s health standards and that the media was reporting on how this was thought to contribute to thousands of deaths annually.

Differently from other groups more centered on environmental perspectives (and thus committed also to ideas such as reducing consumption, recycling, using public transportation, farming organically, etc), however, VivereMilano’s critique of air pollution and of the municipal approach on this matter seemed formulated as a part of their right to a pleasant public space.
This (although not the only) focus of the group on the sensory quality of life in the city reveals both some of the strengths and some of the problematic aspects of VivereMilano. One of the unique characteristics of this movement is its effort to see the city holistically, to link different aspects of daily life in Milan, and to refuse to be compartmentalized in their thinking and actions. It is for this reason that its initiators want it to keep it apart from other, existing, organizations who focus on particular, and limited areas of urban life. It is a humanistic project seeking to address the totality of life and social relations in the city, and reinstating the idea of happiness as a goal and a framework for its actions. In this respect, VivereMilano can be interpreted as potentially challenging Milan’s alleged focus on work, status, and allure, as well as countering the social isolation that many VivereMilano participants talk about.

At the same time, VivereMilano’s holistic concern for the city and its attitude to some of the problems of Milan underscores how very middle class this movement is, in both composition and outlook. We can say in this respect that the very focus on age (it defines itself as the movement of the 30 and 40 years old) as a unifying factor serves to minimize the role of class as well as of other social positions. In other words, it tends to assume that most 30/40 year olds in Milan face similar challenges (while at the same time completely ignoring that those challenges might result from wider economic and social changes that affect their generation in particular ways; see above). Although on the website and at the meeting some people did mention working conditions and the cost of living as urban problems, there was little or no talk about homelessness, poverty, racism
and discrimination, homophobia, immigration issues, and the difficult conditions of elderly persons, especially single women (see Chapter One).

Several statements during the meeting were particularly revealing in this regard. Although a woman raised the problem of finding affordable housing, generating an echo of consensus, the issue was framed as a mortgage difficulty rather than as a shortage of affordable (including government) housing, or in terms of the price of renting an apartment in the city. Interestingly, her joking comment about prostituting herself to get a house points to how women, who are often working part-time or in feminized, low-paid positions have often limited options, outside of marriage, to become independent of their families and to establish a home of their own. (And thus that many of them might have to really resort to prostitution in order to survive in Milan!) Indeed, gender differences between 30 and 40 years old are never specifically addressed, except when another woman talks about the challenges of being a mother in the city – referring however, only to the issue of navigating a stroller through parked cars and non-accessible sidewalk passages.

Another interesting comment is the one of a man denouncing the precarious working conditions widespread in the city. Although he might have meant to say that poverty, and the difficulty of finding a regular, long term job, effects everyone, it is striking how in his words poverty becomes a disturbing sight, and a problem for the urban environment as a pleasant, civilized, and middle class space. The references by several participants to the weekend flight from the city is also typical of middle and upper class residents. As one of the
interlocutors explains: “in the weekend I escape to [Tuscany], I do not go promenading in Duomo”. The talk about the Saturday flight from the city was recurring at the meeting and is especially interesting given that VivereMilano was born from an explicit refusal to leave Milan in the weekends – both physically and metaphorically – in order to start engaging with its problems as “awakened” and “aware” citizens. On the one hand, this call, made explicit also in the manifesto, reveals how, as a matter of course, at least some of its participants can afford to leave the city on a regular basis to spend some time in the mountains or by the seaside. On the other hand, the conscious decision not to go somewhere else on Saturday and Sunday opens a particular position for the VivereMilano participants. According to the manifesto, by deciding instead to stay in the city and to care for it, the members of VivereMilano see themselves connecting with a quintessentially Milanese identity and group of people. Ideally, they identify with the Milaneses who in the past decades would stay in the city in the weekends both to enjoy its cultured pleasures (like going to the Scala theatre) and to meet in order to provide leadership to Milan.

While the forum’s spontaneity – as a movement of people coming together and talking to unknown others - and its passion to improve living conditions in the city have an utopian appeal and perhaps even constitute an alternative idea of citizenship, these comments give a sense of a group of professionals claiming a role which they see as being already rightfully theirs. Indeed, it is the combination of these two aspects that makes this group so interesting for a discussion on public space. Now that these middle class 30/40 years old have woken up, they
can almost effortlessly start talking, and assuming a position that has always been available for them. Politicians are listening to them, they have come to their meeting, and they might try to rally them for their cause or party. Similarly, the newspaper has been encouraging them, and offering them space for expression and representation. This is clearly not always the case for other meetings and groups, such as the frequent immigrant’s demonstrations, or the actions of the Social Centers (see Chapter Three and Four).

Without implying that VivereMilano will necessarily be taken seriously by the municipality and the media, nor that they occupy a simple, uncontested position, nor even that the term “middle class” might suffice in characterizing this complex and heterogeneous group and their efforts, their participation and vision raises some interesting questions. What are the links between the underlying assumptions some of the forum’s comments make about the city, public space and its occupants, and the fairly privileged social standing of the VivereMilano participants? In other words: How does a middle class movement occupy public space? And what does this say about public space, the way it works, who it belongs to, and its relation to politics?

It is interesting in this respect to look more closely at the stone plaque (situated on the pillar under the street sign) under which the group assembled on January 23.
This sign, as well as other inscriptions nearby, reminds passerby that the Galleria has been known – and presumably is supposed to continue to be - the “living room” of Milan. This is because it has always been considered the traditional meeting point of its residents, and one of the most important places for social interaction. The imaginary of the living room however - a location in the house which, in contrast to the kitchen, is traditionally reserved for polite conversation and social/status display (see Del Negro, 2004; Portelli, 1990) - also reflects the un-named/un-mentioned specificity of the public envisioned as its primary user: mostly upper class Milanese (men).

As Castellaneta writes, historically the centre was the domain of privileged classes, with workers and political activists constituting the “violations of this unwritten code” (Castellaneta, 1997: 99). According to Castellaneta’s descriptions, lower class people did use this space, but according to very specific
roles and social connotations. Apart from activists and dissenters, lower classes were present in the centre either as workers and identified as such, or as spectators of a display that saw higher classes as protagonists. As Rotenberg (2001) discusses in relation to 19th century European metropolises, in this politics of visibilities, less privileged residents of the city were cast as desiring subjects, separated by their very act of viewing from the more affluent city dwellers (see Chapter Five for a longer discussion of his argument).

Although in the last part of the 20th century there has been, so to speak a democratization of public space, and in contemporary Milan a wide variety of people uses the central plazas and streets, this does not mean that everyone is equally welcome in them. This feeling is reflected in the common complaint that the centre is not like it used to be, and especially that immigrants have taken it over. Another example is also the municipal prohibition of sitting on the steps of the Duomo cathedral. This rule, in place for at least a decade, is meant to discourage loitering at this location. The police however, enforces the prohibition differently depending on who tries to sit on the steps. Immigrants and street vendors seemed to have less right to be in the quintessential public space (the most central square) of Milan than do white women and men.

Gathering exactly – although perhaps not intentionally - under the inscription of the “living room of Milan”, VivereMilano is in a strikingly easy position to resonate with the plaque’s imaginary. Although the group did not refer directly to the sign and its expression, VivereMilano’s use of and presence in public space does not challenge the plaque’s reminder of the particular public
who is supposed to be and speak there. On the contrary, it confirms it. Many of
the participant’s comments show that the movement seeks to recover public
space for Milanese exactly by referring to traditional ideas of who is entitled to it.
After all, the manifesto declares, the issue is not these 30-40 years old have
been marginalized from the city, it is just that they have never cared for what is
legitimately, and as a matter of fact, theirs. By actively forgetting to remember
that many people are excluded from the city, the forum of VivereMilano can work,
paradoxically, as an invisible act of erasure. It causes me to wonder: can public
space still work as a locus where people are confronted with diversity and
engage in critical social debates, if the voices of those who speak deconstruct
the silences needed for other commentators to say something too? In other
words, is the embodiment of the ideal of the agora by those who are already
privileged and entitled to it, the definite death of public space (if here ’public’ is to
include everyone)?

This dilemma of public space and unequal participation also emerged in
interesting ways in the forum’s talk - or rather, in its effort not to talk - about
politics (meant as the conventional political and electoral system, but also
encompassing wider political processes). One of the major themes running
throughout the meeting of VivereMilano was the nature of the relationship
between political representation and the movement’s presence in urban space.
The issue has also been debated at considerable length in the webpage, as one
of the cornerstones of the movement is their insistence not to be a political force.
As stated in the manifesto, VivereMilano is largely founded on the disillusionment
with traditional parties. In that document, in the webpage, and in the forum, most participants and its most vocal speakers insist that their engagement with the problems of the city stems from a moral and civic role which has very little to do with the political spectrum. The following comment posted on the webpage on April 10, 2005, is an example:

The ones who say that we have to align ourselves [with a political party] do not understand one thing. We are already aligned! We are committed to better our lives, without pretending to revolutionize the system. We would like, very simply, to improve the system of life without necessarily inventing another one, but instead returning to the basic rules of community: a group of citizens who are not satisfied meet in a "virtual plaza" to understand how they can improve their quality of life. Simple, elemental, powerful. ("Cambiare...", 2005)

The very presence of VivereMilano in public space that January morning was meant to symbolize a different approach to the problems of the city than the one offered by the conventional political system. While for many participants this seemed to be a crucial and necessary aspect of the association, for others it seemed a source of bewilderment. One of the bystanders of the January meeting, for example, a local administrator of a nearby municipality, explained that he has always been involved in politics, and thus he came to the forum because he was curious to see who these people might be, who are the same age as himself, who had never been involved and always stayed out of political discussions.

As a bystander/participant in the meeting, I was deeply struck by the uneasiness which seemed to pervade the group whenever politics was mentioned, and I was fascinated by the sense that in the forum participants were
talking about politics in spite of themselves. For in the very moment in which
speakers stressed the independence of the movement from political structures,
they necessarily brought to the fore the question of politics in and through public
space (see Mitchell, 1996: 128). As one participant expressed it, there must be a
relation between a large group of people meeting and discussing openly in the
street and the political process, but that link was not clear or defined. Using
Mitchell’s words: now that VivereMilano’s participants occupied this space “for
representation” (Mitchell, 1995: 115), who/what exactly did they seek to
represent?

Analyzing anti-government protests in Argentina in the 1990s, Guano
(2002) suggests that public spaces help constitute groups and individuals as
social and political subjects. Through their presence and engagement in public
space, people who could otherwise be seen as simply “private individual[s]”
(Guano, 2002: 306), and “politically irrelevant being[s]” (Arendt, 1958, quoted in
ibid.) become and/or are seen as “public persona” (ibid.) One reason as to why
and how people and movements can claim this role is that public space works
also as a multiplicity of “performative arenas” (ibid.). Being in and using these
locales necessarily involves an engagement with multiple audiences, with various
layers of meanings and histories of spaces, and with different notions of
citizenship and identity (see Taylor, 1997; and Chapter 7 for a longer discussion
of performativity in public space).

Following Guano’s insights, I would like to argue that VivereMilano’s
evocation of public space as locus for encounter and debate, and their
enmeshment with the very theatricality of public space (see Chapter 7) then made it almost impossible to deny their position as both political actors (the people who vote) and occupier of places. Paradoxically, however, because the link between occupying public space and doing politics was inevitably coming up, the *VivereMilano* meeting itself could also be seen as an effort to keep questions of politics at bay. To say it differently, the very forum sought to carve public space as a place where people could participate as residents instead of political subjects. Interestingly, this also championed the concept of public space as residual instead of constitutive of political struggles and processes. Public space worked in this imagination as what could stand apart from politics, a place where “people” can meet and talk and from where “a-politics” itself could be constructed. The forum’s deep ambiguity in relation to the political, itself loosely and confusingly defined, upheld a view of space as homogenous, equally accessible to all, and truly public – constituted by a set of relations which are assumed to be already “settled” (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005: 367).

This, to recall once more the plaque above, also meant that the forum effectively effaced the specificity of the subject allowed to inhabiting public space. The following invitation, posted in May 2006 by Cesare Fracca on the webpage, to gather for the second time in the same location as the January 2005 meeting is interesting in this respect. It reads: “Let us show again in Piazza del Duomo our love for this city, our will to change it and to render it more similar [sic] to us, to our children, and to our parents” (Fracca, 2006). I interpret this call to reflect the participant’s desire to live in a city which offers a better quality of life
to its inhabitants by being – according to a common Italian expression - *a misura d'uomo*: made with human "measures", that is corresponding to people’s needs and rythms; literally, to live in a city which “fits” its inhabitants.

At the same time, however, this call is also strikingly ethnocentric: the self the city should resemble (the self reflected in *our* parents and *our* children) does not seem to include many unnamed and undefined others who also reside in Milan. The notion of public space *VivereMilano* suggests, as fixed, neutral, homogenous and outside of political processes, in turn normalizes the subject who is legitimately entitled to it: the "unproblematic", "standard" citizen, the parent or child of white, Italian, middle/upper class Milanese.

The contradictory ways in which *VivereMilano* made itself present in the city introduces some interesting aspects of Milanese public space, which I will further address in the following chapters. As an extensive literature on urban space, power, and spatial governmentality has discussed, some public are more entitled than others to use and inhabit public space. Scholars have pointed out that public space is more a fiction than a reality, as it belongs more to some groups of people and to some “publics" than to others (Dines, 2003; Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2000; Mitchell, 1995; Rose, 1993). Impoverished people, immigrants and minority subjects, women and homeless persons are marginalized from urban locales in a variety of ways – including surveillance, regulations, physical barriers, and symbolic and economic discrimination.

Ironically, however, in Milan, this differential entitlement to the city manifests itself *both* in the way the middle and upper classes claim city spaces,
and in the way they ignore or renounce them - or perhaps more precisely in the ease with which they can move between these two positions. Better off residents can marginalize themselves from public spaces (see also Caldeira, 2000) – or at least say that they do - and choose not to engage with their diversity. This is because they have more resources than poorer residents to meet in and use “less public” spaces and to access recreational destinations. A white, Italian-born street vendor who has been working in the centre for decades, for example told me that: “here [in piazza del Duomo] you do not see the bella gente [well-off people, literally: the beautiful people]. The bella gente meets in other places, they have cars and can meet wherever they want” (November 5, 2004). Similarly, Andreotti (2006) notes that “[t]he most marked form of segregation, as Preteceille remarks in his studies of other European cities (2000), does not seem to involve the lower-income classes to the same extent as it does the upper-income classes, who segregate themselves in the more central and exclusive areas” (Andreotti, 2006: 330).

What is interesting is that better off residents’ retreat from public spaces does not make urban locales any less their own. When they occupy plazas, they are still able to make a compelling argument for their belonging there. Indeed, in a way, their ignoring public spaces as important locales for the negotiation of social and political citizenship can work to efface their very role and privileged position within them. As Gordon (1997) would have it, the strategic absence of well-off Milanese in this context can be an important (and “ghostly”) presence in the making of social reality.10
CHAPTER THREE: SPATIAL POLITICS

Discourses and practices concerning urban space by the Social Centers offer a strikingly different vision of public space from the self-ascribed concept of "a-politics" of the VivereMilano forum. Social Centers are autonomous community centers, serving as venues for political, social and counter-cultural grassroots activism. They are usually housed in (illegally) 'occupied' buildings, and they often designate themselves as “self-managed public spaces” (see for example, www.leoncavallo.org). In this chapter I will briefly introduce two of these centers, the Leoncavallo and the Casa Loca, along with some of the characteristics on the wider movement they belong to. I discuss here the Social Centers not only because of their interesting contrast to VivereMilano, but also because they have played a particular role in the city since the 1970s by fostering an on-going, though largely silenced, discussion on urban spaces.

Their “marginal” yet “fruitful” (Mudu, 2004: 926) influence can be seen, for example, in the large number of people who visit a Social Center in Milan (an average of 20,000 visits each month, according to Maggio, 1998, cited in Mudu, 2004: 926), and in their ability to mobilize a large number of people for events and demonstrations in very short periods of time (see also Membretti, 2003). According to Membretti, moreover, the Leoncavallo, the oldest and biggest of all Social Centers in Italy, has become a symbol for the wider movement, and the object of an extensive imaginary.
As I argue below, the Social Centers see urban space as deeply political and as a central locus and object of struggle. While keeping alive a public memory of the conflicts fought over and embodied in urban spaces, Social Centers try to claim different modalities of space, time, and sociality. Vecchi, for example, calls them “fragments of an alternative public sphere” (Vecchi, 1994: 5), because they are both experimental places for creating social relationships based on equality and diversity, and opposing capitalist market structures, as well as public spaces from which to debate urban spatial politics and governance. In this chapter I will look at some of these aspects and will listen to Franca and Jacopo, two of the many people who have participated in this movement over the years. Jacopo, a student, was at the time of my research involved with the newest Social Center in Milan, called La Casa Loca (the Crazy House in Spanish). I met Jacopo the first time I visited this center, and he introduced me to the building, its projects, and some of its dreams and strategies. Jacopo had recently moved to Milan from another city in Northern Italy in order to attend university. Franca, a mother, grandmother, and activist, is a long-term resident of Milan. She is one of the Mothers of the Leoncavallo, an association of women who have been involved in the Center for more than two decades. Today, most of the Mothers are in their seventies and eighties, but they are still very active in the Center and in the wider movement, where they are very well respected.

Because Mothers like Franca have been part of most of the Leoncavallo’s life, and have at the same time witnessed the dramatic changes and struggles
happening in Milan from the late sixties, they represent, in certain respects, the historical memory of the Center. Their work of remembering and continuing to tell what happened then, how it was/is connected to past and present places and people, and why forces from the left and the right have always been part of the story, is particularly important in the context of this movement. According to the Social Centers, in fact, it is only by refusing to forget that it is possible to uphold a vision of space as social, and not just a collection of places that can be changed and disposed of at will. According to Franca, however, forgetfulness is widespread in the city, and is indeed a strategy for pushing to the margins the people and groups whose stories do not fit well with more official histories of Milan (see also the abstract of "Building Zenobia" in the Introduction, and Chapter Seven). In keeping with her insights, I found it important in this chapter to give attention to chronicles - that is particularly situated recollections and analyses, aimed at reformulating the histories of places, people, and events in the city. The commentaries of Franca and Primo Moroni, that I present in this writing, as well as the exposition "The city that will come" created by the Leoncavallo, are examples of chronicles. As the very title of the exposition indicates, historiographies are not only a way to map the past and the present, but also to try and shape one's future, in/through the terrain of the city as a crucial component of social action and identities.
Three images from the exposition "The city that will come: Thirty years in Milano, the metropolis of movements", hosted by the Leoncavallo, that reconstructed the history of Milan from the seventies to today from the perspective of Social Centers.

Through the juxtaposition of photographs, chronologies, and analysis, this chronicle links spaces with events, people, political developments, and social conditions in Milan.

Here below, for example, the exposition recounts the history of the Piazza Fontana bombing, with images, artwork, dates, and a description (highlighted in yellow).
Membretti (2003) writes that there are more than 100 Social Centers in Italy, and Mudu estimates that in the years between 1985 and 2003, more than 200 Social Centers have been created in almost all regions of the country (see Mudu, 2004: 928). It is important here to note that it is a very heterogeneous, "segmented" and "policephalous" body (Membretti, 2003: 79). The Centers are organized differently from each other, focus on a variety of goals and actions, and relate in different ways to the communities in which they are located (see Membretti, 2003: 72ff). Moroni’s dizzying description of some of the Milanese Centers in the 1970s gives a clear sense of their diversity:

More “serious” and political is the Leoncavallo, where is prevalent the component of ex-militants coming from the “groups” (...) together with the workers-renters neighbourhood committees; decisively “autonomous” and movement-oriented is the Fabbrikone (within it find space the workers of the autonomous Assembly of Alfa Romeo [a car factory], the renters committee of the South area, but also much of the countercultural “movement”); there is Via Correggio, with (...) [many] immigrant families (who changed the space into accommodations), a (...) school, the Coordinating Group for precarious workers, some feminist collectives, and, later, the headquarter of an important part of the libertarian Milanese component; there is the strongly politicized Via dei Transiti; the poetic, metropolitan, countercultural Fornace; decisively hardcore, autonomous, politicized are both the Argelati P38 and the autonomous Collective Ticinese; Conchetta and Torricelli are anarchic and libertarian and co-inhabit [the center] with the Collective of hospital workers, the Committee for the fight for housing, and are searching for new forms of “unionism”; finally, already at the edge between the circoli [see below for a description of these] and the emergent punk movement, we find Santa Marta. (Moroni, 1996: 174-176)

While, as the quote above shows, Social Centers escape easy definitions and common descriptions, they, along with the social actors associated with them and the struggles that accompanied their formation, do nonetheless constitute a
social, cultural and political movement. According to Membretti, some of its central aspects are an important youth component, the illegal occupation of buildings to transform them into liberated, self-managed community spaces, an internal organizing structure usually based on non-hierarchical, egalitarian relations, and the creation of alternative forms of sociality, of work, and of cultural and material production (see Membretti, 2003: 72ff).

An interesting feature of the movement is that it resembles a flexible, everchanging net – spanning all but two regions in Italy. In the words of Mudu the movement as a whole can still be described as a search for a “multi-centered non-hierarchical affiliation network” and this network structure is indeed one of the most interesting aspects of the movement. Each Social Center can be described as the central node of a network of activists, sympathizers and occasional visitors, and each such node plays a role in building a collective identity founded on the sympathetic attitudes of an informal circle of occasional visitors prepared to travel in a wide gravitational area to attend events in one or the other Social Center. (Mudu, 2004: 927)

The importance of participant’s personal networks, alliances, and friendships is also evidenced by one of Franca’s joking comments, that even when she and her family go away from Milan to spend their holidays, they find themselves visiting other Social Centers and/or friends involved in them.

The movement of the Social Centers is linked with and has to be understood in relation to the troubled history of Italy in the last century. The post war years saw, first, hopes for a left government in the country, and then, a general disillusionment with institutionalized politics. In the fifties and the sixties, Italy had the peculiar mix of a strong workers movement and the political, economic, and administrative legacy of the fascist regime (see Ginsborg, 2003).
This combination, together with other factors, brought the left to ally itself repeatedly with the Christian Democrats, and resulted in the latter’s rule that lasted for five decades. In the later part of the century, moreover, rapid deindustrialization in most Italian cities muddled classic struggles between workers and bosses, and between left and right, urging a whole generation of activists to rethink social inequality, utopias, and identities in a postindustrial and globalized world.

The Social Centers in their current form were started in the 1970s. They were strongly associated with working class struggles; they used, by and large, communist idioms and ideals, and were informed by the long history of conflicts which had, since the Second World War, divided political allegiances into fascism and the resistance to it. As I described in Chapter One, the late sixties and the seventies were a particularly troubled time for Italian politics and society, which saw an escalation of conflicts at all levels of society. Social Centers were particularly active in these struggles and debates. The eighties were a time of underground activities for most Social Centers. In Milan, in particular, heroin became a primary concern for many youth in the city and for many activists from the Social Centers, who organized campaigns against drug trafficking but also saw many of their friends killed by it. The nineties, however, saw a reemergence of Social Centers with a renewed opening towards the wider public. New groups and services were created, showing a shift towards new areas of research and action, such as immigrants rights, precarious working conditions in Milan and in
Italy, free trade and neocolonialism, and the patenting and commercialization of knowledge.

The changes I briefly described above have also been shaping the relationship between Social Centers and the urban terrain. The oldest Centers were at first conceived as a part of the axis factory – home – community center. They provided services to working families that ranged from health to recreation. As the repression against organized labour increased, and the latter started to lose ground in the city, Social Centers could be seen as replacing the lost public spaces: the plazas and streets where working class interests had been debated, demonstrated, and fought for (Mudu 2004). The issue of space became particularly central as Milan was closing its factories and its economy was changing in favor of the tertiary sector. Ironically, in fact, the diffusion and “multiplication of ‘productive spaces’ in the metropolis did not at all mean that there has been a multiplication of public spaces where it is possible to exercise political action” (Vecchi, 1994: 6). In this context Social Centers became instruments to invent and construct alternative public and/as political spaces.

Among the Social Centers, the Leoncavallo in Milan is the oldest, best known, and largest in Italy. Because of its exceptionally long history, its complex transformations, and its role in a number of important events and debates, the Leoncavallo shows both some important characteristics of the more general movement, and, at the same time, constitutes an exception to it in several ways (Membretti, 2003). Started in 1975 at another location, the Leoncavallo occupies a large building, a disused printing factory, in via Watteau, a peripheral area in
the North West of the city. It includes two large halls which can be used for
concerts and expositions, a kitchen, a cafeteria, a bar, a café, offices, a
bookstore, and a green courtyard which can be used in summer. The many
organizations, committees and groups that operate within the Center are involved
in many different areas, from cultural and media productions, to the liberalization
of drugs, to sustainable development, and the rights of migrants. Apart from
initiating and carrying out social and political campaigns, organizing concerts and
performances (Membretti (2003: 201) writes that in 1999-2000 there have been
84 of them, and estimates that more than 100,000 people in total attended them),
facilitating public fora, and holding regular discussion groups, the Leoncavallo
also operates a legal counselling service and an Italian language class, a radio,
and activities for children.
Four images of the Leoncavallo: (from left to right) the entrance of the building, previously a vacant printing factory, one of the halls with the exposition “The city that will be”; the courtyard, and a banner hanging in the courtyard with the writing “Return the city to us! We want it back”.

This current Leoncavallo building was occupied in 1989, after the squatting of other premises, and their subsequent evictions by the police. Although in recent years, the Leoncavallo has “regularized” its position in relation to the municipality (causing important rifts in the community), they are still in continuous danger of eviction. The words of Franca (January, 18, 2005) vividly describe its turbulent history and the struggle for its very existence:

I was working. At a certain point I heard at the radio that they had killed two youths, Fausto and laio. I immediately stood still. Two youths that visited the Social Center Leoncavallo. Considering that at that time my daughter was already 14 years old, 13-14 years old, and from time to time, with friends, when there were concerts, she went there, I said: “Oh my god, what happened?” And then they said the day of the funerals (…). I went, I phoned the boss [at work] and said: “Tomorrow I will not be there, because I will go to the funerals”. (…) And that one, he said: “But Mrs., they were two
criminals”. And I said: “Let’s stay calm, that is to be seen. I will start by going” (...).

I went and I was surprised by how many people were at the funeral of two youths of a Social Center that was not even yet known. It was full full full. The people could not fit in the church anymore. The people who did not fit in the church were occupying the whole Street Casoretto (...) I was shocked and said: “Here I have to understand what it is that is not right”. At that point I talked with my daughter and my daughter said: “Yes, mom, there are also the “Mothers of the Leoncavallo”, of the Social Center... and one of these [youth] was the son of one of the “Mothers of the Leoncavallo”, the other one was not”.

So I went to see this Center that was supposed to be a cove of criminals, a cove for deranged youth, etc. and I realized that it was an error. I had the fortune to meet the Mothers, for this reason I went on a Sunday afternoon, because they met every Sunday, so they told me the story.

This Social Center has been occupied because it was a dismissed area that did not serve anyone. In practice, some youths used to go, they drank a beer, and so on, so the Mothers said: “Come on, here we don’t have anything. For the youth do not have practically nothing, let’s help them clean [the place] so that they can stay there”. So there they let them stay, they [the authorities] did not
move. When the fact happened, of the two youths that were killed, the authority moved.

Consider that in the same moment that we went to the funerals of Fausto and laio, in the house of the two youths, in the same moment that the funerals were going on, the police went to the house of one of the youths and they ransacked the whole house (...) to see where these youth were hiding the weapons that they supposedly had in their house ... they did not find anything. (..)

Then every fifteen/twenty days we would go to the court (...) nobody knew anything. At a certain point it was discovered who it was. But we could not have the names of these people. (...) They knew who it was, but one did not know, that is officially one did not know. We had our own information sources, and they told us that they could not do it [to tell the names] because the order had come from a very well-known public office (...). From that moment, we kept the court case open, but one did not know anything. After eighteen years, they wanted to archive the case. So they archived it, and we reopened it (...). It went on for very long time (...). Now it has been archived. (...) One did not know. The judge (...) was eating his hands [that is, was frustrated]: "What do we do? We do not have the official proofs". (...) The association Mothers of the Leoncavallo was formed for this reason. To have more access to public offices.
Fausto and laio were killed on March 18, 1978 on the street while they were returning to their home. Although the killers are unknown, many people believe that they were murdered because of their research on and activities against drug trafficking in the area. Groups from the extreme right are also suspected to have been involved, although until now, there has been no resolution to the puzzle nor a publicly accepted version of the events. Many people of the left, and the community of Social Centers see the murder of Fausto and laio, more generally, as one episode in a long and complicated history of violence which has earned this period the name of the “Bullet Years” of Milan (see Ginsborg, 2003). This included a number of shady dealings against the left by right wing forces (see ibid). The Mothers of the Leoncavallo, by keeping alive the memory (and courtcase) of Fausto and laio, have been refusing to forget this time (and its continuities with the present), the struggles that have marked the city and its spaces, and the need to find answers to their questions. At the same time, it is an action meant to defend Leoncavallo’s right to exist and to propose a different set of ideals and values than the ones promoted by the ruling powers.

At a certain point came the fearful eviction notice of September. 

(...) Every time that they destroyed ... every time that they were supposed to destroy it (...) tomorrow morning, ... this afternoon ... there will be the forceful eviction of the Leoncavallo ... we always succeeded to know it a few hours in advance, sometimes a few days in advance. At that point one called the associations that are in all Italy and they would come to give us a hand: (...) thousands
of people [would come], (...) we would make a rally that went to the
centre [of the city] (...) and every time, because there were so
many people, they couldn’t do it [the eviction]. (...) At that point we
had organized ourselves: we need people who stand on guard. (....)
They did not leave the Leoncavallo neither at night nor during the
day. (...) On a tragic morning they call: come at once to the
Leoncavallo (...) my husband accompanied me and when we went
there it was full full of police. (...) They entered by force, the police,
and they destroyed everything, everything: computers, the kitchen,
the desks, the paintings (...).

After this famous eviction that they succeeded in doing (...) they
gave us a little building, (...) in Via Mecenate (...). We went there,
(...) Then one day, we were just coming back from holidays, the
15th of August, and I hear the TV that says: “In this moment there is
the eviction of the Leoncavallo”. They had taken advantage of the
fact that we were all away (...). I jump down from my chair: “[her
husband], take me there!!” (...) We did a big rally, (...) then we all
tented in a park –fortunately it was summer – in a park that was
close to Via Mecenate (...) and we stayed there night and day, we
took turns [being on guard]. We (...) made huge pots of pasta and
we brought them [to the tents] at noon, with bread, ham, some
things. Then (...) we went to Martesana, another fifteen days at
Martesana. There too a never-ending solidarity [from people and
groups]. Then at a certain point they phone and they tell me: “Come (...) to Via Watteau”. We went there and there were lots of people; the youths had entered [a disused building, and] put out the flag. (...) Since we were in so many the police (...) did not attack. So that evening we organized a big concert (...) free for all.

One of the aspects that most struck me from Franca’s narration is her and other people’s active engagement with the issue of space in the city. Our very first encounter is a vivid example of this. On a cold and grey weekday morning, I went to a residential building in a peripheral area of the city to meet another one of my interviewees, an elderly woman who lived there with her husband. The building itself, a social housing project, is an interesting place, as it is one of Milan’s characteristic case di ringhiera. This kind of apartment building, usually associated with working class families at the time of the industrial boom (Foot, 2001: 9), houses one- and two-bedroom apartments connected to each other by an outdoor hallway. The structure is built around a courtyard, which had been used in the past as a meeting place for children, adults, and seniors alike. (This is in fact, one of the courtyards that VivereMilano referred to in its meeting, when it proposed to “revive” their use as a social space). Unfortunately, that morning my interviewee forgot our appointment, and so I found myself wandering in the courtyard and outdoor passages instead. This is where I met Franca, who approached me with a friendly smile to ask me if I needed some help. Thanking her for her offer, I explained that I had come there to meet some people in order to talk with them about public space. “Public space?” exclaimed Franca
enthusiastically; “I can tell you about public space! Public space, we occupy it!!!” (January 18, 2005)

As Franca points out, public space is not taken for granted, but rather it has to be made and reclaimed. (And thus, in relation to courtyards, for example, it cannot simply be “revived” by declaring it an important space that should not be used for parking). Public space is the result of concerted efforts, militancy, and political action. Squatting, as a model for its construction, has to be seen in this light. As Mudu writes: “Squatting is an essential component of the strategic mix of these Social Centers (...) because it is a way of obtaining what has been denied” (Mudu, 2004: 922). According to Franca, the city denies residents in the city, and youth in particular, places of sociality with are accessible, affordable, and which foster equality and sociality between people:

There are no spaces for young people in Milan. Because if a youth is a student, already the family is having trouble to support him/her, (...) if s/he does not find a job, or even if s/he finds it, if it is precarious, it’s the same [as not having a job] where does s/he go in the evening? So, if it is a youth who (...) has easy money from father or mother, there is no problem (...) but for who does not have [the money] the problem is there, and it is big. (...) So they come to us.

Starting from an affordable recreational space, the Center seeks to build an alternative model of sociality, that includes the recognition of diversity, and the extension of citizenship rights to all residents of the city. With these goals in
mind, occupying spaces is both a way to draw attention to issues of urban planning and inequality – and more generally to the social, cultural and economic construction of space - and a way to create veritable public spaces.

The essay by Moroni highlights this double relation with the urban territory – that is, the on-going struggle to construct oppositional spaces within it, and an engagement with the urban terrain directed at understanding, representing and criticizing Milan’s complex and dynamic spatial politics. Mapping the creation and distribution of several generations of “oppositional” centers (including but not limited to Social Centers) in the Milanese area, he points to the deep linkages between the creation of oppositional associations, the industrial and economic development of the city, and the “social history of (...) urban spaces” (Moroni, 1996: 167). He argues that because of the circular and spiraling shape of Milan, its residents experience and move within the city along triangles “whose peaks insinuate themselves in the historic centre while the basis (...) widen within the suburbs” (Moroni, 1996: 164). He describes two of these triangles, one located in the South and one in the North. The way in which Moroni differentiates between the two triangles is especially interesting, because it is an effort to trace a history of space conceived as an important component of social action.

According to Moroni, although both triangles include important working class neighbourhoods and represent the route of approach of the lower classes to the material, institutional, and symbolic centre of the city, the Southern triangle is closer to the centre than the Northern one is, because of the uneven growth of Milan. The first one, in fact, has its peak in the heart of the historic centre, and
very close to the neighbourhoods of Ticinese/Genova. The second, Northern triangle, on the contrary, has its peak located much further from the centre, close to Piazza Loreto and Corso Buenos Aires. From this location, points out Moroni, the route to the historic centre leads through Porta Venezia, Corso Venezia which is “empty and unwelcoming”, and through San Babila, which is “one of the most elitist and inimical [plazas] of the whole metropolis” (Moroni, 1996: 165).

Because of this situation,

the big working class neighbourhoods of the North and North east (...) are much more distant to the historic centre [of the city] than the ones of the Southern areas of Milan (...). But the first ones are not only topographically more distant [from the centre]. They are also located in a urban situation which includes more “obstacles”, more “foe” territories between the inhabitants of these places [the Northern neighbourhoods] and the use of the historic centre, living “soul”, centre of power, and place of innovation for the life of the city. (Moroni, 1996: 164)

This difference between Northern and Southern Milan, writes Moroni, is even more marked if we consider that the Southern triangle includes a route of approach that is decisively “friendly”, because it is lined with places such as stores, clubs, and low-cost restaurants that are affordable to working class people. Moreover, “[t]o these characteristics that mark the different urban location of the two triangles,” writes Moroni, “one also needs to add the particular history of the area Ticinese/Genova (peak and heart of the Southern triangle), that is one of the oldest areas of the city” (Moroni, 1996: 167). This neighbourhood, which also includes the remaining Navigli canals, has always been

a mixed social composition of handicrafts, diffused factories, popular classes and extralegal [people and activities] (...) [This is
the] reason why the social micro-system Ticinese/Genova ends becoming an exemplary urban frontier zone between centre and periphery, but also at the same time a social frontier system between [different] classes (...). And it is because of the sum of all these characteristics that the peak of the triangle of the Southern area will become in the first years of the seventies the European neighbourhood with the highest concentration of extra-parliamentary political bases. (ibid.)

Continuing with his socio-historical history of urban space, Moroni describes how the symbolic and political meaning of the historic centre, to which the triangles point to, has been changing through time, thereby sparking different forms of action by oppositional groups and different relationships between the latter and the territory of the city. An important component of these developments were changes in the relation between labour and capital in the region. While in the sixties and early seventies, the industrial working class had more of a definite identity and bargaining power, in the seventies a crackdown on organized labour broke down its unity and caused a crumbling of the associations that Moroni above calls "extra-parliamentary political bases".

The members of these organizations, (like many other, 'regular' people in Italy who during this time had hoped for a left government in the country), became disillusioned with the very possibility of acquiring institutionalized power\textsuperscript{15}, embodied and symbolized in the city centre. As factories closed down, and as industrial production became smaller, more decentralized, more disseminated, and less labour intensive than before, new groups and action centers - called "circoli" by Moroni - were established in the suburbs. These associations, by younger activists who Moroni describes as "inexorably destined to the informal economy" (Moroni, 1996: 169), were guided by a desire to realize
new social spaces which could represent them - spaces closer to the suburban
neighbourhood they grew up in and which ignored the city centre as something
distant and "irrelevant" (Moroni, 1996: 170).

These groups, suggests Moroni, have thus a different relationship to the city
centre than the older generation of activists. They use the triangles to go to the
centre to engage in political actions rife with irony and creativity in public streets
and plazas, and to demand access to cinemas, restaurants, theatres, etc. that
they are economically barred from (the so-called "autoreduction" actions, that
Jacopo describes below; see also Ginsborg, 2003). The aim of these groups,
writes Moroni, is "no longer the one of competing with political institutions but the
one of winning over rights, spaces, and territories that they can control
themselves" (Moroni, 1996: 172). Moroni calls it the "invention of the present"
(Moroni, 1996: 170), because they focus on creating new social spaces which
would help them realize utopian experiences in the "here and now" (ibid.) of daily
life.

I want to open a parenthesis here, to point to a particular event of these
years. It is interesting that one of the most dramatic and well-known incursions of
the left movement into the historic centre was directed exactly at those cultured
Milanese evoked by VivereMilano. In the evening of December 7, 1968, a group
of student led by Mario Capanna, and part of the wider workers/student
movement of the time (see Ginsborg, 2003), attacked the people who were about
to attend the prestigious First of the Season at the Scala theatre, by throwing
eggs and vegetable onto their very elegant attires. It is interesting in this respect
how "Scala-goers" can evoke widely different imaginaries for different groups and at different times. While for the students of that time they represented the Milanese bourgeoisie who was denying them full participation in the city and society, for some participants of VivereMilano the Scala-goers can work as an example of residents who were interested and engaged in the city and provided it leadership.

If Scala-goers can be the object of widely different recollections of the history of the city, so can also its spaces. We might want to remember here that the Galleria and its plaque are at the very heart of the centre of Milan. While VivereMilano sees this space as a simple and apolitical place where ‘regular’ citizens can gather to talk about the city, the on-going, though evolving, significance of the historic centre for oppositional groups shows once more the historical and social specificity of VivereMilano’s project. In other words, it shows that VivereMilano’s use of the space of the Galleria relies on particular interpretations and recollections of the history of Milan, and that is connected, just as the one of the oppositional groups, to categories like class, age, gender, race (and more).

Returning to the geohistory of Moroni, the developments in the region of Milan starting in the seventies also inaugurate a new way of understanding the history of space. Political, social, and countercultural action is no longer directed at the institutional powers embodied in the central urban spaces. Instead, the whole city becomes a political “territory” (cfr. Moroni, 1996: 172). The struggle to change society is no longer sustained from a long-term political vision which
used existing central and symbolic spaces to gain power, but from a deep relationship with post-industrial urban spaces characterized by suburbanization, decentralized production and the deregulation of working conditions.

The Social Centers - which started at the same time as these youth’s “circoli” (see above) and which has continued, in various forms and through highs and lows until today - were born from these particular “urban geometries” (Moroni, 1996: 173). Started by the older activist generation which grew disillusioned with the strategy of competing with the institutional centre, and larger than the “circoli” which proved to be rather ephemeral, they are similar to the latter in that they were formed in working class areas and in a dialogue with the social and political dynamics of each of their neighbourhoods. Some of the most important characteristics which the Social Centers share with the “circoli” are, according to Moroni, the need for the self-government of their structures, “the necessity of being rooted in the territory”, and “the move” of conflicts and inspirations “from the problem of time [working towards an utopian, liberated society of a distant, temporally unknown future] to the one of space” (Moroni, 1996: 178). As Grispigni explains, in the context of industrial work, the goal was to free one’s time, in order to be able to use the available spaces. In a de-industrializing society, where many youth cannot find work, the issue is rather to obtain income “in order to enjoy the great quantity of time free from work, and to have spaces where to consume this time” (Grispigni, 1994: 28).

Furthermore, as many suburbs were restructured and many of its inhabitants relocated, thereby making impossible for activists a “proud belonging
to the periphery [and] to the spaces of memory of the circoli” (Moroni, 1996: 179), the Social Centers increasingly saw all of the different areas of the city (not only the ones where they are located), from the most central and elitist to the most abandoned and underprivileged, as mediums and results of social and political struggles. In this way, the historic centre of the city became once again important for political action, although in a different way than in the alternative political centers of the late sixties.

I find Moroni’s account fascinating because I think that it crystallizes a particular way of thinking about public space. Moroni’s cartographic history shows that the very existence and constitution of Social Centers over time is itself a re-interpretation of urban space in practice, aimed to render visible what is usually erased: the productive relations embedded in and shaped through space and the class formations that go along with it. His urban geohistory shows that social centers are public spaces because they are locations from where the city can be apprehended, interpreted, and acted upon. Public space is here understood as a space – itself constructed in struggle – from where action and reflection is possible.

His analysis recalls the thought of Lefebvre, who argues that “space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations” (Lefebvre, 1991 quoted in Low, 2000: 130). Basing its perspective on a Marxist analysis of production, Lefebvre insists that space is not just an innocent stage onto which society unfolds, but is rather an important component of social action. Every society creates its own
space, and a movement or historical moment that fails to do so is inevitably ephemeral and ultimately unsuccessful (Lefebvre, 1991: 54).

Lefebvre urges scholars to trace the ways in which space is organized and structured so as to sustain a society’s particular modes of production and reproduction. These spatial practices, argues Lefebvre, are strengthened by dominant representations and conceptualizations of space, which are created and planned by architects, urbanists and politicians, and which guide the actual spaces of a society. As Moroni’s commentary and the Social Centers activities show, these ways of organizing and representing spaces are conceptualizations particular to some individuals/groups and not others, and they do not benefit everyone in the same way.

Following Lefebvre, oppositional activists and commentators engage with the urban territory in a double way. By critically examining urban spaces, and especially the ways in which different kinds of spaces sustain, intertwine, and/or interrupt each other, they bring into view a social history and ‘memory’ of space that mainstream discourse and city officials tend to erase (see also Chapter Seven). Moreover, participants of Social Centers intervene in the production of public space, taking an active part in the creation of what Lefebvre calls “representational space”: space rendered meaningful by people’s activities (see also Chapter Four).

To say it differently, Social Centers use space as a medium and result of social action. As Membretti explains in regards to the Leoncavallo, a Social Center is “a political actor” by (and because of its) being at the same time “a
territorialized actor” (Membretti, 2003: 70). In this way of thinking, urban spaces are not necessarily public by being formally and administratively so, or by not being privately owned. For one, according to Franca’s words, contemporary public spaces are often spaces which are indeed private but have been occupied and made public. For the other, public space is in this context perhaps better understood as a living network of places - some public, some private - realized by particularly situated people. As in Moroni’s account, this territorial web acts as a public space by allowing the expression of particular subjectivities, knowledges, and social relations.

The focus on liberated spaces also informs the recent creation and innovative counter-cultural projects of the centre La Casa Loca in the Northern neighbourhood of Bicocca. If the Leoneavallo is the oldest Milanese Social Center and embodies a very long and complicated history, la Casa Loca was at the time of my research the newest Social Center in town. Jacopo (March 11, 2005) recounts its beginnings:

In 2003 (...) we were in Chiapas (...) Some of us were already working with Chiapas, like [the organization] Ya Basta of the Leoneavallo, etc. There was this student trip in 2003 (...). We had a fantastic group in Chiapas. We return and we say: “Why don’t we start occupying a space in Milan?” (...) So with this group, mixed, that was also coming from different realities [situations and experiences], (...) in three weeks we entered in this space. So with very little time to do (...) some preparing, a well-done plan, also of
what we really wanted (...). So for the first period, (...) taking the space, that was perhaps the only positive thing, of these first six-seven months of pure craziness. Then (...) we had to re-structure a bit of everything and then launch ourselves with [as a] the public space. (...) From the strongly political point of view we started to work from September of this year. (...) We also re-launched its habitative context [as an affordable student housing], but in an absolutely different way: not a house for us, [some of its members were living there since the start of the occupation] but a service [for others].

Jacopo explains that the Casa Loca works as a low-cost residence for up to ten students attending the nearby university, Milano-Bicocca. Often these resident students become part of the collective of Casa Loca during their stay, and participate actively in its projects. The services of Casa Loca include a low-cost cafeteria, catering mostly to the students in the area. The center is also linked with immigrant rights associations. One important action some of its members had been involved with, through the organization ActionMilano, has been the occupation of the so-called Plastic Houses (Case di Plastica) by a group of 24 Latin-American immigrant families. The Plastic Houses, a building constructed with experimental materials and innovative floor plans in 1970, had been left vacant for 10 years, waiting for needed but never realized restructuring work. It is located in the Northern periphery of Milan, and it is owned by Aler, the municipal
body responsible for social housing. Following the occupation, the families that started to live there organized and carried out some restructuring themselves.

Because it is an architectural pioneer work, and because it was occupied by immigrants, who, as a category, are one of the groups that experience the most difficulties in procuring accommodation, this action draws attention to several issues at once. It speaks of migrant’s rights, and issues of poverty and marginalization. It reveals the incredible waste of resources in Milan, in which buildings stand vacant and lands unused, in spite of the lack of affordable housing for many of its residents - and irrespective of the fact that accommodation problems are one of the most significant factors in the impoverishment of lower income residents (see Zajczyk and Cavalca, 2006). Last but not least, the activists of ActionMilano and the Casa Loea see in the occupation of the Plastic Houses a statement on the need to use creativity and specialized knowledge, such as architecture, to profit the wider community rather than a small privileged sector of the population.

A particularly interesting aspect of Casa Loea, in fact, is its relationship with some students and teaching staff of Architecture at the University of Milano-Bicocca, and its focus on the reappropriation of knowledge about the city and the territory. A result of this relationship has been the workshop called "Building Zenobia" held at the Casa Loea from January 6 to 16, 2005. During the workshop, students, activists, and professors explored questions of urban space and citizenship focusing on a dismissed area between the municipalities of Milan and Bresso (see Chapter Five). In those ten days, participants first completed a
text of invitation to their project, an “abstract” as it was called, that had been started through an internet forum prior to the beginning of the workshop (see the Introduction for an excerpt of this invitation/abstract). Then, divided in four groups, students and researchers proceeded to design possible floorplans for a renewal and use of the area. While planning possible settlements in the dismissed area, Zenobia participants wanted to create and widen debates on the urban renewal in Milan (see Chapter One), and on the concept of social space - that is, space as always connected to multiple and intersecting rights, and of the historical memory that marks urban locations (see Zenobia’s abstract in the Introduction). The issue of the Plastic Houses was also debated during the workshop, together with some of the residents of the occupied building. Jacopo recounts the workshop as following:

It is a key project, according to me (...): we started this collaboration with the architects - researchers, students of architecture, people like that, with whom we made this workshop in January (...). This continues with a tail of the project which we have in mind, which is an active mapping of all the North area of Milan, which goes from here to ... also including Sesto San Giovanni, Bresso, Cormano, so also the hinterland, until, returning to Milan, until Bovisa.

(...) This active mapping has the goal of containing a lot of different knowledges, (...) that then we have to put in relation to each other (...) so that we can reach an in-depth study, an analysis (...) that
would not only show the architectural, the cartographical, aspects, etc. For example, what I am doing, we are forming a research group (...) that will carry out of interviews, sociological analysis, things like that. Then there will be an architecture group, that will focus on more architectural aspects: on spaces, territories, and properties (...) The series of groups, collaborating with the university, will put their knowledges in the net, so that we will have North Milan with all of its characteristics, also its enormous changes. Since this neighbourhood is a prince of the transformation happening in Milan: from no-one’s land to one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods: university, theatre, shopping malls (...).

All neighbourhoods in Northern Milan are suffering this shift, from industrial (...) [to postindustrial]. Now the launch of Milan as an European city, the flower-on-the-coat of the well-off-Milan. Here, in Bovisa, also in Affori, they are all terrifying projects, on which we want to investigate, we want also to understand what are the flows – of people, (...) of different knowledges, of processes (...).

One goal is to succeed in approaching the university in a different way from what it was before, because obviously the [old style] university collectives today, according to me, have very little sense, considering that the university is now organized so that the time you spend there is very limited (...). It is a place that pushes you to, really, just consume a lecture/class and then move on. (...) The
university collective [involved with Casa Loca is trying to] (...) offers an educational, a research [experience] that is better than the one of the university (...). In this [way] professors, researchers, etc. collaborate with you, because they are also very unhappy with what's happening [at the university]."

Another focus of Casa Loca (as well as most other Social Centers in Milan) is the concern with what Jacopo calls the current "precariousness of existence". The Center had recently organized a conference on precarious working conditions, and many of its activists have been involved with the apparitions of San Precario. The latter, a rhetorical, symbolic, and highly carnivalesque figure, is the patron saint of precarious, casualised, sessional, intermittent, temporary, flexible, project, freelance and fractional workers (...). The saint appears in public spaces on occasions of rallies, marches, interventions, demonstrations, film festivals, fashion parades, and, being a saint, processions. Often he performs miracles. Although the first appearances are recorded on 29 February 2004, San Precario has multiplied and materialised in different disguises. Equitable in his choices, San Precario does not privilege one category of precarious worker over another, and he can appear in supermarkets in urban peripheries, in bookstores or, glammed up, at the Venice Film Festival. San Precario is also transgender, and it has appeared also as a female saint. A "cult" has spread rapidly and has led to the development of a distinct and colorful iconography, hagiography and rituals. (Tari and Vanni, 2005, no page number)

As Jacopo explains below, the figure of San Precario is meant to protest an increasing deregulation of working conditions in Italy, and the spread of informal, "atypical", and temporary contracts for many workers. It is, moreover, connected to wider critiques against contemporary work and sociality, global politics and division of labour, gender constructions and the organization of knowledge. The
manifesto of the movement from which it emerged exemplifies this multiplicity of agendas:

We are eco-activists and media-activists, we are the libertarians of the Net and the metroradicals of urban spaces, we are the transgender mutations of global feminism, we are the hackers of the terrible real. We are the agitators of precariat and the insurgents of cognitariat. We are anarcho-unionists and post-socialist. We are all migrants looking for a better life. And we do not recognise ourselves in you, gloomy and tetragon layerings of political classes already defeated in the XX century. We do not recognise ourselves in the Italian Left. (quoted by Tari and Vanni, 2005, no page number)

Although San Precario was not “born” in Casa Loca, but was a creation of another group, the Chainworkers, Casa Loca has been one of its apparition places and has provided the elusive saint followers and support. Considering that students, university researchers, and instructors in Italy are also greatly affected by precarious working conditions, San Precario, as an idea and series of organized actions, is also linked with Casa Loca’s focus on the revaluing of skills and the reappropriation of knowledge for oppositional purposes. This is what Jacopo says:

The phenomenon of San Precario, that has been the icon – or the non-icon – of these years, well, the beginning was February 29 of last year. The most precarious day of all was chosen (...). We did the launch of this saint, this icon of precariousness, we did it here in a supermarket, with an absolutely relaxed little action, here in Milan (...) The autoreduction [that was carried out during that event] was in reality a return to a [particular kind of] action (...), because it had been used a lot in [past] times. It came back into fashion even
before San Precario, here in Milan we did a few of them
[autoreduction actions], four or five if I don't remember wrongly,
even before San Precario, some successfully... we did one here in
the shopping mall, an enormous one, that worked supernicely, (...)some that did not come out right (...). Then slowly we worked
instead on this icon that could also include/embody all the analysis
that the Social Centers, but also all the movements in general have
been doing since a long time. San Precario now, like all icons,
contains a whole range of meanings, that have then to be
expanded and dislocated on different territories in different ways.
Now San Precario we want it in Punti San Precario, as territorial
realities, that are service centers throughout all of Italy, that help, in
regards to like the right to housing, work, the right to income, (...)So there is the attempt to apply/use this icon, also at the practical,
territorial level.
The work of *Casa Loca*, such as its focus on the reappropriation of knowledge
and its involvement with San Precario, is emblematic of the shift of Milan from an
industrial center, to the city in Italy "that best represents the main features of the
so-called post-industrial or post-Fordist economies" (Aaalbers, 2007: 186). This
is strongly reflected by the location of *Casa Loca* – geographical and symbolic –
at the middle point between an old working class neighbourhood and the new
developments of Milano Bicocca, which include the university as well as
expensive new residences. Jacopo explains:
“On this neighbourhood, on Casa Loca in itself, on the possibilities of this space, and the ideas that sustain it, I think that by looking to the other side of this street [Viale Sarca, where Casa Loca is located] one understands the big significance that this space [Casa Loca] has for Milan. (…) This one is one of the neighbourhoods that are a flower-on-the-coat [of the city], one of the neighbourhoods on which people are promoting big speculations, new fundings, development of chains of shopping malls but not only, the use of knowledge produced in the university by multinational companies (…) [This] is all a context in which [our] (…) presence is very interesting. And for us to work in this neighbourhood is very beautiful, (…) also [in regards to its] human fabric, [there is an older population] that still resists [the developments].

Already there is Viale Sarca [Street] that divides in half the Bicocca [this neighbourhood]. On that side there is the superexclusive part where one apartment costs, I don't know, four-five thousand Euros per square meter, and on this side there is the old part, the social fabric of factory workers that lived here since the 60s. Historically this neighbourhood had been a neighbourhood of incredible struggles, in the Resistance [to fascism during the war], then later in the 50s, and in '68, [there was] Viale Sarca that exploded… So here there is a fabric that is strong and very rooted, but that is absolutely disoriented by what has been happening in the last 20
years. It has lost all of the oldest reference points that it had. This space itself [Casa Loca], for example, was an old reference point, because it was the after-work building for the Pirelli factory workers. Here was the Pirelli cinema, an external courtyard, there was everything the worker needed for recreation at the end of the work day, so also symbolically at this level it was an old reference point.

So we find ourselves on this thin balance line.

According to Jacopo, the “active mapping project” of Northern Milan that he describes above is also meant to be a tool for engaging with the older residents of the neighbourhood, and a way to debate the past, present, and future of the area with them.

Jacopo stresses that it is particularly significant that la Casa Loca itself occupies a disused and abandoned building of the Pirelli factory. This company, in fact, has been a major player during the years of industrial expansion in the city. Following the closing of its factories, Pirelli reinvented itself, among other things, as a real estate developer. As Aalbers describes:

The oil and industrial crises of the early 1970s hit Pirelli hard, but the subsequent restructuring of the industry and the company itself made Pirelli rise like Phoenix from the ashes—a car tire manufacturer turned real estate developer using their derelict brownfields for large and profitable urban redevelopment projects. (Aalbers, 2007: 186)

Pirelli’s change is both indicative of what Aalbers calls the shift of investment from the primary to the tertiary sector, happening in Milan today (see also Chapter One), and is also a sign of the change of the use of the urban territory itself.
Here, like in Chapter Five, I cannot but think of the abandoned after-work building as a spatial version of Gordon's (1997) ghosts (that haunt the social and have important effects by not being there): an emptiness embodying a significant absence, from where spaces can be redrawn and rethought, and entire cities recreated. By locating itself exactly in this zone of boundary, on the edge not just between historical periods and neighbourhoods, but also between uses and representations of spaces, Casa Loca might indeed be in a strategic position for conceptualizing public space, knowledge, and identities. Jacopo's idea below of creating a space on the model of the shopping mall is interesting in this regard:

You cannot put back into the field old tools (...) Some of the Social Centers continue to talk about the movement and struggles of factory workers but I think (...) they still live of projections that do not exist any more. (...) The changes are more and more ... oh, how should I say it in a few words ... what is out in the field on the other side is very interesting ... obviously it attracts the attention of most of the people in a sweeping way. So you, in order to adapt to these rhythms, to the offer that your enemy has, you have also to use its languages, you have to use them to your advantage — perhaps by mimicking them (...) to show everyone how false they are (...) — but you have to be in the position to be able to use its instruments, you have to be able to study them, (...) and give them meanings (...) So [this has meant] a distancing from what were the old styles of the left, according to me not [far] enough yet. It is
obvious that you always carry history, and your past, within you - also rightly so - but [there is] a distancing that is more and more strong and spicy. Otherwise, your failure is certain. From the other side, you have an adversary that is too strong. For example if you consider that the plazas, a symbolic place of sociality, now are empty, and instead the shopping malls (...) on Sundays people go there, even without buying anything, walking and chatting, that is a space of sociality. You have to study things like that. We in Casa Loca we have a project, for example (...) of rethinking this place in its characteristic like a shopping mall, using the same instruments but with our own offer. So for example to create a plaza that is covered (...) [using] a series of positive characteristics [that the malls have] (...) So we thought of covering our courtyard, making it into a plaza, and then around it a series of [alternative] businesses (...) a “Mall Loca”, (...) a “Mall-titude”.

Jacopo’s idea of creating a ‘counter-mall’ in Casa Loca is particularly telling also if we consider that the dismissed area between Bresso and Milan that was the object of the workshop “Building Zenobia” is at the centre of conflicting interests exactly because its owners want to build a shopping mall on it (and not, for example, sell it as is to the municipality so that it could build on it affordable housing). The idea of the mall, moreover, can help us think about the forms that nostalgia can take. According to Foot, the industrial past of the city is the source of romanticism and feeling of loss for many people of the left, and for many
workers (Foot, 2001: 175-176). While Foot argues that often the world of the factory itself is seen as a golden era, despite the fact that many commentators of the previous generations depicted it as a monster, according to Ginsborg (2003) the workers who have participated actively in the struggles of those years, remember with fondness particularly the feeling of empowerment, purpose, and hopeful possibilities.

We can perceive a tinge of nostalgia both in Franca’s evocation of the battles of the *Leoncavallo*, and in Jacopo’s description of the working-class part of Viale Sarca, with its strong legacy of resistance. At the same time, however, Jacopo argues that history and the nostalgia it inevitably generates, should not blind us to the ways in which society changes, and with it the dreams and identities of rebellious subjects. The dismissed areas, and the Social Centers with/in them, can no longer be the place where the traditional left clashes with the traditional right, or where workers talk about class consciousness. Rather they are located in a thin line of difference, which requires new subjectivities, icons, and models than the ones of the past.

Here, once again, the active engagement with and reinterpretation of spaces, with all the struggles and social relations they embody and engender, is a crucial axis of action. In fact, this is perhaps the aspects that help give such a heterogeneous net of people, places, and strategies, called ‘Social Centers’, the form and feel of a movement (see also Dines, 1999). This comes perhaps even more to the fore if we consider for a moment that there are interesting discontinuities between the *Leoncavallo* and *La Casa Loca* - which are indicative
of the generational gap between the two and the different ways in which they have been positioned towards the social, cultural, political, and economic changes which affected Milan and its territory. The very way in which I approached the two places is telling in this respect. When I was in Milan, I went to the Leoncavallo because, as almost everyone else in the city, I knew about it even before I visited it. Moreover, I was particularly interested in its exposition "The city that will come", that I mentioned above.

In contrast, I found Casa Loca in a much more circuitous way. Although I had first heard of Casa Loca from Franca, who offered to take me there one day, my actual visit was the direct result of having finally found San Precario on its doorsteps, after a search which took me several weeks. Franca herself was ultimately the one who revealed that San Precario, of whom I heard about from acquaintances and from reading about it in the communist daily newspaper, often lived in Viale Sarca 183. This is how San Precario appeared to me on that morning of revelation, just in front of La Casa Loca:
Characters like San Precario and the collaboration with the architecture students - aspects that made me particularly interested in *Casa Loca* - exemplify some of the new roles, engagements, and oppositional creativities that might be needed in order to promote a more equitable Milan. In this respect, young centers like *Casa Loca* might be better positioned to carry out innovative countercultural interventions than the *Leoncavallo*, whose existence has been so strongly shaped by frameworks and idioms that are more directly linked to communist ideals (in all their variations).

At the same time, my approach to *Casa Loca* reveals some important continuities between the *Leoncavallo* and the *Casa Loca*. The two centers inhabit the same network, and they are connected through people and actions. The
Mothers of *Leoncavallo*, like Franca, in particular are well respected in the wider community. It is thus not surprising that I could find *Casa Loca* and San Precario by following this thread. Moreover, and most important for my argument, the active creation of liberated, self-managed, public spaces is at the core of places like *Leoncavallo*, *Casa Loca*, the Stecca degli Artigiani (see Chapter Five) and similar groups. Although the relationship between Social Centers and the urban territory changes through time, space – and squatting as a strategy - has always been and remains a central medium and result of struggle. Squatting is the most visible expression of this. Both the *Casa Loca* and the *Leoncavallo* illegally occupy places which have been left over in the difficult deindustrialization process. Maintaining these locations means also to make visible many of the social and political strands which make up the very territory of the city. It is by being at the epicentre of this active spatial knowledge that the center as public space has meaning - as a place where residents of the city become public personae (see Guano, 2002), people capable of engage politically, socially and culturally with the society around them.
CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING SPACES, CONSTRUCTING SELVES

The actions, ideas, and experiments of Milanese Social Centers show that public space cannot be taken for granted. Here I will discuss two other encounters I had during my research - one with two women who I will call the ‘Schuster Youth’, and one with a young priest, Don Felice (also a pseudonym) - that similarly emphasize that public space is a precious resource which needs to be continuously claimed, made, and realized.

In this chapter I will discuss two main ideas. First, I will talk about some of the linkages between immigration and public space. My three interlocutors, who moved to Italy from Latin America, point out that journeys of migrations shape in important ways people’s understanding and participation in public space. The particular social conditions many immigrants find themselves in, such as a difficulty in finding adequate housing, discrimination and racism, long hours of work, and social isolation, effect how they see and what they seek in public spaces.

Secondly, I follow Don Felice’s insights on the constructed nature of public space. His words resonate with scholarly discussion on how people reinterpret, claim, re-define, and re-create urban space. The ways in which some immigrant groups use and claim Milanese spaces is an example of these processes. Don Felice’s commentary, moreover, remind us that diversity itself is socially
constructed. His words caution us against an easy identification of "ethnic uses of public space" that is often voiced in the media and in everyday local discourses. To say it differently, while his and the Youth's words demonstrate that immigration is an important force shaping city spaces (and vice versa), Don Felice's comments also suggest that it might be necessary to question nationality and culture itself as a fundamental character of our relationship with the city. As Narayan writes (1993), we can be both insiders and outsiders, in different ways, in particular times and places. Tracing the dynamic, power-full processes which make us "native" and/or "other" might be a more fruitful approach than equating identity with a fixed spatial belonging.

Listening to Don Felice as we walk through crowded markets and silent courtyards, I also cannot help but wonder: how can we talk about something which, as Don Felice tells me, might be better described as a shifting sand-dune, or a warm feeling under our walking feet? Don Felice taught me that an important part of public space exists only in the ephemeral moment of its making. In the second part of this chapter, I combine two very different conversations about public space I had with Don Felice in order to describe public space as both regulated and structured, and fleeting, fluid, and improvisational.

I.

I met the Schuster Youth in the spring of 2005, at the Schuster Center, a Catholic parish and community centre located in the outer rim of the city. The two women I talked to migrated to Milan from El Salvador when they were in their
teens, and one of them worked as a live-in domestic help for several years. At the time of our conversation, they were both students in postsecondary institutions. One of the Youth was particularly interested in studying the history of the Milanese Salvadorean community, which she described as one of the oldest immigrant communities in the region. Both women have been very involved in the Schuster Center's activities since several years. Indeed, I met them after talking to a representative of the youth association of this church, following the suggestion of a member of its congregation. Our very conversation (February 6, 2005) took place in a room of the Centre, during the women's free time between the mass we attended and the activities of the youth group they were involved with.

When I asked them about public space in Milan, the Youth explained that they had "more space there". The shrinking of space they experienced when they moved to Milan from El Salvador invests at the same time public and domestic spaces, and because of this, is perceived as even more constraining:

I remember the first time that I arrived in Italy, we were in the house of a friend and I asked my mother: mum, where is the other room? Where do we sleep? Because I could not conceive the idea of (...) a space so little. This is something also for the kids, for example, who come from El Salvador, (...) they are used to big spaces, to run, even if in poverty, but there is the space, you see, the country, one can move, one can run, one can scream, you are in your
house, you can listen to music. Here you cannot do that, because you are disturbing the one that lives under, the one who lives over.

For the Schuster Youth, a sense of being watched from all sides and never quite having enough space, seems to pervade most places in Milan. One of the women, for example, recalls with nostalgia sitting on Salvadorian town squares with friends, and compares it with having to endure hostile gazes and gestures in crowded buses. Even if they seem smaller and less 'inhabitable' than the ones in El Salvador, the women explain that Milanese public spaces are nonetheless significant locations for gatherings, recreation, and for their participation in the daily life of the city. Indeed, for them, one of the most important aspects of public spaces is their ambiguous role as both a resource and a burden – as both places of freedom/sociality, and places where identities can become difference in the eyes of many Italian Milaneses.

In our conversation, the two women talked particularly about Milanese parks, the Duomo Plaza, and the Schuster Center. The latter, they explained, is particularly important because it works as the main gathering space for the Salvadorian community. Although the Center is not, strictly speaking, a public space, the people who use it, make it into one.

Youth One: Sure, [here] we [still] do not have that [much] freedom, because (...) it [the Schuster Centre] is not ours, (...) but, for now, (...) we succeed in doing many important, big, celebrations here. (...) Like for example the (...) independence from the Spaniards is celebrated here. So for us is important to have a space. Not all
The Youth discuss public space in relation to their membership in a community they strongly associate with. Their comments echo the observations by Mauri, Cologna et al. (2003) that Milan does not offer many spaces where immigrant groups could meet as a community. These include public and private spaces where people could celebrate festivals, hold religious ceremonies, and more generally, meet and socialize (Mauri, Cologna et al., 2003: 231). Indeed the women explain that Salvadorians are among the few lucky ones to have a place at all where they can gather and speak Spanish. Even then - and similarly to other communities’ use of church spaces - the Schuster Centre, while providing Salvadorians with a place which acts in many ways as a public space, is a locale which they can never entirely call their own. This location, moreover, might distance from this community other Salvadorian Italians who do not wish to be connected with the church.
The general lack of meeting places for immigrant communities is due to the expense of renting, or buying/building, and maintaining a cultural and/or community centre as well as to the scarcity of existing community structures which are not affiliated with local religious institutions. Some immigrant groups with a Catholic background, such as Salvadorian in this case, can use existing pastoral buildings. However, communities who have little or no affiliation with Christianity, or who wish to keep religion at bay, may have to resort to use places like post-industrial facilities for gatherings and festivals (Granata, Novak, and Polizzi, 2003: 100).

In regards to public spaces, the dynamics are even more complex. Perhaps because Milan has very few parks, because its streets and plazas are usually busy and crowded, and because it has been until recently a very homogeneous society, the use of public spaces by immigrants, whether as individuals or in groups, tends to be seen as posing a challenge for the “co-inhabitation of urban spaces” (Mauri, Cologna et al., 2003: 231). Picnics in the parks and gatherings in the Duomo Plaza mentioned by the Schuster Youth are interesting examples. According to the two women, parks are an important place of aggregation for Salvadorians in Milan, because they allow for many social and cultural activities to take place at the same time:

Public space for us (...) is the one of gatherings and celebrations, music, being together, for this reason it is often a park. Especially during the good season, we organize ourselves, sometimes even with barbeques, and all that, and [a park becomes] a meeting point.
where perhaps one plays soccer, (...) softball, basketball. So it is a way to meet, to eat together.

Don Felice, below, also described visiting one of the parks and finding a group of people who reminded him of his country, Mexico, listening to music, selling food and small items, and creating, in his words, a wonderfully festive space.

There is another space (...) that for me is very interesting (...). It is a park. (...) Especially Peruvians meet here, (...) you can go around the park and here for example (...) you can find lunch, here you can find music, ... and here only games (...) It is a family place, the problem is that there are so many who come here every (...) Saturday and Sunday to meet. According to me, (...) because they cannot find space perhaps in this area [the centre of the city] let's say European, with European character, they gather, [they] construct a space for themselves that relates to the memory of their culture (...) Whenever I have been here, I have been immediately transferred, transported to my culture, in the sense that the music, the salsa, the cumbia, (...) the Latin-American aspect you can breathe it immediately. (...) This is another space (...) that people construct for themselves (November 5, 2004).

Picnics in the park by non-Italians, however, are not always regarded with sympathy. The Milanese section of the Corriere della Sera of May 7, 2005, for example, writes, that “Milanese parks are off-limits for the residents”, because in the weekends they are ““occupied” by foreign communities” (Verga, 2005).
issue, describes the journalist, is that gatherings of immigrant groups in the parks are too loud, last for too long, ruin the grass, leave the space dirty, and often even break the law, as when the people drink alcohol there, or charge tickets for dancing or listening to the music. This problem, continues Verga, involves most parks of the city, and “recently, we hear disquieting signs even in the very central Public Gardens of Porta Venezia”. The spokesperson of an association created in order to “defend” one of the parks explains:

We only want the respect of the rule and of nature (...), not discrimination. We don’t hold anything against the foreign communities, but if we wanted to say it provocatively, we could say that there has been an ethnic cleansing in the other direction. These days, the inhabitants of the area in the weekend go somewhere else (Verga, 2005).

Another spokesperson quoted in the article similarly declares: “The citizens, in the weekend, do not go anymore to the park”. What I find particularly interesting in this and the other two articles that appear on this issue, is the way in which they contrast Italian and “foreigners” uses of parks, and the way in which immigrants become, by default, not “residents”, not “Milanese”, and not “citizens”.

The issue also emerges as one of visibility, presence in, and entitlement to Milanese spaces. The vice-mayor Riccardo De Corato is cited in one of the articles as saying:

in Milan, apart from the illegals, there are over 150,000 regular extracomunitari who work all week long and who cannot disappear during the weekend. And while many Milanese have the good fortune that they can go to Rapallo [on the seaside] or to Courmayeur [in the mountains] on Sundays, they do not have any other meeting place than the parks. (De Corato quoted in Foschini, 2005)
As I discuss in Chapter Five, the visibility of immigrants does not necessarily lead to a greater participation in society - according to the idea that public space makes visible subjects and groups, facilitating their representation in the public sphere. Here, for example, it rather seems to spark a (hidden) desire that they could just “disappear” on Saturday and Sundays, leaving the city for its “residents”, the invisible Milaneses who go somewhere else than the parks.

While De Corato’s words show that particular people use the city in particular ways, depending on a variety of economic, cultural and social factors, and on social positions such as class, race, nationality status, gender, and more, his comments still suggest the imaginary of two different publics - the Milaneses, and the extracomunitari - who are completely different from each other. Here I want to point out that Don Felice and the Schuster Youth also talk about immigrant communities’ and Italians’ uses of public spaces. After all, there are culturally and locally informed ways to do things in places. These however, always intersect with particular contexts, practices, and structures, and cannot be understood as an essential and foundational relation to places. The Youth and Don Felice in fact emphasize the particular, social conditions of the people who migrate, and the specific journeys of migrations they travel, as well as the processes by which these Milanese are rendered foreigners and extracomunitari in Milan.

To say it differently, the Schuster Youth talk about their identity as Salvadorian migrants to stress that their social positions in Milan effects the “claims they can reasonably put forth” (Tsing, 2000: 338) about their role,
entitlement, and participation in urban public space. On the contrary, in much media and political discourse immigrants can only and necessarily relate to public space on the basis of nationality, race, culture, and ethnicity. In this way, Italians and non-Italians both emerge as monolithic categories which point to immigration not as a phenomenon encompassing a myriad people, countries, and life circumstances, but as a handy and fixed variable in deciding who is in the city, with whom, and what they are doing there. It makes it possible to say: 'oh, look, these are immigrants, they are using the city in an immigrant way'.

Similarly to parks, the Duomo Plaza, according to my two interlocutors, is an important public space for many migrants, while also being in many respects a place of contention.

Youth: Unfortunately if you work [as live-in domestic help] in a family and you have perhaps the Saturday and the Sunday free, you do not have a reference point. So the park becomes a meeting point [with other Salvadorian people]. However, in the solitude you find yourself in, far away from home, perhaps without a job, perhaps you start to drink. So you see for example in the Duomo Plaza in Milan, it is full of immigrants because they do not know where to go, perhaps they do not know that there is a community, in our case a Salvadorian community. For this reason [the Duomo Plaza] becomes a gathering point. (...) And the Italians say: look at all the foreigners with the beer in their hands. (...).
Cristina: So in the Duomo Plaza go mostly people who (...) find themselves lonely, less in contact with a community?

Youth: Yes (...) Have you gone to the Duomo Plaza? Try passing there on a Thursday. Because it is the free day [for many live-in domestic workers]. Or on Saturday. Or Sunday.

According to the Schuster Youth, the Duomo plaza is a necessary place for many Salvadorians who “have nowhere else to go”. This speaks of the fact that public spaces are often the only thing that is left to people who do not have access to adequate private or community places, and/or and services (Mitchell, 1995). In this case, because of the social isolation and harsh labour conditions of many immigrant workers, the Duomo Plaza is an important place of sociality and recreation. As mentioned by the women, this raises complex debates on proper vs. improper uses of urban spaces and their effects for the residents at large.

Still, and in spite of the women indicating that only more socially isolated persons use it, as a vital meeting space, the Duomo Plaza might be working exactly as a public space should. It is a space of social interaction, allowing the people who use it to claim a space in the city, and to constitute a public with a particular identity, in a sense a temporary community (Dolan, 2005). Don Felice’s comments on the Duomo Plaza emphasize this positive aspect:

This one [the Duomo Plaza] I would rename it Plaza of Cultures.

(...) Especially Latin-Americans are slowly - how can we say? They are transforming this space into their own space, (...) a place of their own which however, always remains open (...). Near this one,
there is (...) San Fedele (...). It is interesting, because San Fedele is the (...) plaza of Philippines. Because here you see many Filipinos, and Latin-Americans (...). Especially the teenagers are slowly slowly starting to construct this space for themselves, as a plaza, as their own space (...). We can say that they are appropriating this space. (...) And the Nigerians (...) they start to sell books (...) They too are starting to be very much in this space (...).

This [Duomo] plaza is filled with many ... can we say cultures? (...) Every day I see a Latin-American who sits here; in the weekend they meet to make the space. (...) It is as if it was an open space. (...)

Don Felice sees the claiming of public space by various immigrant communities as extending, and in a sense revitalizing, the role of the plaza as a public space. Similarly, he recounts that near where he lives, a group of Albanians meets every day at the same time in a little park to play soccer. According to Don Felice, that park, “that is already itself public”, but that “no-one from here, the Italians, would use, would play on”, is inhabited by these people [the Albanian soccer players], and in this way it becomes effectively a public space.

Public spaces, however, can also easily become a locus of scrutiny and judgment, and an arena of negotiation about who is entitled to use which spaces in the city and how. While this holds true for all city dwellers, the Schuster Youth indicate that this is especially the case for people who can be identified as non-
Italians. Their description of the Duomo Plaza above reminds us that immigrants tend to be seen – rightly or not - as group users of public space more easily and more often than Italians are. According to Mauri, Cologna, et al., in fact, one of the questions that emerges in the context of immigration and public space is: "how is a coexistence of different uses, of collective vs. individual and family uses of open spaces possible?" (Mauri, Cologna, et al., 2003: 231; emphasis in original). This question sparks many other interesting ones: how do we define what collective vs. individual uses of public space are? Who engages in which one, in which contexts, and why? And when is a person who is moving and participating in the city an individual and when part of a collective?

As I started to discuss above, these questions attest, firstly, to the unseen, taken-for granted, and normative white-ness of public space, and secondly, to the different roles that public spaces play in relation to the different social positions of their users. The description of one of the women of her free time in the city, in which she can get a break from the constraining work as a live-in domestic help, is particularly telling.

Youth One: Perhaps there [in Duomo Plaza] you can find a conational, even – you have to understand - even the simple fact of being able to speak Spanish, rather than ...

Youth Two: … working (...) because I have had this experience (...)

I worked for four years with this old lady who was nice and all, but, indeed, you feel like you are in jail. You have to ask permission to go to the washroom, to take a shower, … if you eat, she has to be
there to see what you eat, and if you do not eat she is still there: why didn’t you eat? You are not well? But one is well, is just that (...) sometimes one feels (...) sometimes I remember how beautiful it would be, I would say, if perhaps, even if not my mother but at least someone else was here, with whom I could talk about something. I could speak Spanish, and so I remember in fact every Saturday when I went out I felt free, really free, to exit from the front door – how wonderful! I went out all night long, with the friend I lived with (...) I talked all night long (...) all of those words [that were] inside me that perhaps [otherwise] I could not say to anybody (...) And there I also remembered that (...) I come from the countryside, right (...) I remember that at home in Salvador … the house is big (...) *nosotras traevamos las sillas e la ponevamos en la calle*, that is we put the chairs on the street (...) and there we would sit and chat, how beautiful, and there on the other side, close by, there was a plaza, there were all the kids playing (...) but everything was beautiful, everything outdoors, and here instead you cannot afford [are not able to do] that.

Youth One: … also the time [here is lacking] (...) there is also a change of climate (...) 

Youth Two: … but sometimes (...) sometimes there is perhaps a little hour (...) but [even so] … here there is no space to do that (...).
Youth One: You don’t know where to go, you do not know what to do, because, we can say, society does not allow it, or the place does not allow it, it is many things [at once].

More than a fixed and definite place, public space here emerges as a dimension across time in which to experience freedom and human connections. Although for this speaker public space in Milan is definitely not as ideal as the one in El Salvador, its utopian feeling causes her to switch languages and to resituate herself in a different place, where past, present and future could exist without interruptions.

One of the women’ insights is that the very meaning of public space is always deeply dependent on one’s experience and life stories in the city. One of the two women summarized this in a very poignant way:

She came here alone when she was 17 years old. (...) I came here alone with my mother when I was 11. We have been each other's [only] family for all this time. So now [that you know this], do you understand why it is so important to us to have a place where we can meet [other Salvadorian people]?

The woman’s comment was phrased as an urgent reminder because it was directed to me as a person who could clearly rely on family connections in the city, and who could easily claim Milanese public spaces as my own (see Chapter One). My interlocutor rightly assumed that I would need to be able to imagine what it might be like to live in Milan alone, or with just another person, to work long hours, to miss my first language, and to be in a precarious situation, to even
just start to understand what public space could mean for people who are
differently positioned than myself. The Schuster Youth indicate that it is perhaps
not possible to understand the meanings and forms of public spaces, nor the way
in which they work, without considering the social positions, the personal
journeys, and the circumstances of those who use them. For many migrants who
work long hours and cannot have a space of their own, public spaces is a crucial
resource. Not only because it is a space outside of one's house – which for many
immigrants is often too small, but because it also provides a community space.

Unfortunately, even if public space is often a necessity for many
immigrants, the latter are often those who have the hardest time to claim a space
in the city. Indeed, this seem to be almost an opposite situation as the one of the
VivereMilano's participants, who seem very welcome in the public space that
they have ignored and escaped from for many years (see Chapter Two).

Although this is the case not only for immigrants, but also for other less privileged
social groups, (such as low income Italians), the former are in a particularly
vulnerable situation when it comes to using public space, because of the ways in
which their very presence there can make them “other” in the eyes of many
Italians.

Dines' research on the position of immigrants in relation to urban renewal
in the Southern Italian city of Napoli is a case in point. Dines argues that
immigrants' uses of the Piazza Garibaldi (a huge plaza in the historic centre), the
social relations they engage in with other residents and businesses, as well as
their claims to and visions of the space was completely erased in the context of
urban changes. During the plaza’s renovations, in fact, which happened in conjunction with the G7 summit in 1994, the municipality relocated immigrant street vendors because their presence would otherwise have “threatened the urban decor crafted for the event” (Dines, 2002: 181). In exchange for this ‘invisibility’ the municipality promised to build, after the summit, three “ethnic markets” for immigrant street vendors, provided they sell ‘authentic’ “ethnic” merchandise from their countries so that the markets can “become an attraction for tourists and Neapolitans” (ibid.).

According to Dines, urban renewal in Napoli is presented and discussed by the municipality and the media as a process by which local people can recuperate a positive identity of the city by displacing unwelcome citizens, such as immigrant street vendors. (This is not to say, however, that immigrants do not resist these definitions and processes). This is accomplished in part by talking about the piazza as a site of otherness and disorder, antithetical with the true Napoli, and even destructive of its identity and authenticity. In this process, if the immigrant is to be included, it is only as the quintessential – and “authentic” other, as “ethnicized” vendor for tourists and Neapolitaners (which thus excludes immigrant residents of Napoli) (see Dines, 2002).

Dines example points out once again, that public space is not simply there for all to enjoy and use, but it rather “belongs” to particular publics. Moreover, it is always the object of contending visions, claims, which are negotiated through people’s use and re-appropriation of spaces. To say it simply, public space is constantly made and created in a place-making process fraught with power
differentials. Here I would like to turn to Don Felice's words, because they
describe in a very poignant way how public space is created by people's actions
and narrations in their everyday life. What I find particularly interesting in his
commentary, moreover, is how his subtle substitution of imagination for
immigration and creativity for cultural identity opens possible ways of regarding
both immigrant’s relationships with urban locales and the character of public
spaces.

II.
Don Felice moved temporarily to Milan from Mexico in order to study theology at
a Milanese university. In addition to being a student, Don Felice had been
officiating as a Catholic priest in a parish close to the Southern periphery of the
city. Shortly after I concluded my research, Don Felice moved to a church in a
smaller community outside of the Milanese municipality, joining the many
commuters into the city in order to continue his studies in central Milan. I met
Don Felice several times during my research, in a variety of settings. These
included the streets and cafes of the centre, my apartment, and his parish, where
I attended the mass he celebrated and where I took part in a Mexican gathering
and party he helped organize for the congregation. In what follows, I present
some of his insights on public space drawing from two of our encounters: an hour
and a half interview which took place on November 5, 2004, in the church office
where he lived and worked, and a two and a half hours guided walk in the centre
of town, on November 18, 2004, during which we met several other people,
visited the university he attends, and had lunch together.
In my writing below, I decided to combine these two very different conversations, contexts, and texts, because what I learned from Don Felice resulted not just from what he told me during our interview, but also from the walking conversation we undertook together. In the latter, public space became visible as a shared context which allowed words to be spoken and listened to, images to be seen and interpreted, encounters to take place - and all of those things to be weaved together in a meaningful fabric. This walk through the city was also for me a reminder of the ideas and concepts which Don Felice shared with me during our previous conversation about public space.

To say it more precisely, an important part of what I learned from Don Felice, emerged from the very difference between these two encounters and the two texts that I wrote to represent them. The fact that the interview was taped and the walking tour was not brings this particularly to the fore. Although I had brought my tape recorder with me during our walk, there was no moment in our city journey that seemed stable or settled enough to start recording. This is because our conversation was interrupted and enriched by many encounters, which weaved in and out of both our movements through the city and Don Felice's words. Images and sounds also became important parts of the conversation.

Rather than putting this encounter aside as "too messy" to say anything about public space, I want to include it here, albeit through fragments, because I feel that its very "messiness" is exactly what can give us a sense of the character of public space. I thus created a composite text of the two conversations, in
which the interview text is written in regular characters and the walking tour in italics. In doing this I follow Fabian's (1990) insight that sometimes ethnographic knowledge comes from a “missing text” or from the gap between dialogues. To say it differently, the difficulty in ‘pinning down’ and representing fluid social interactions in and through spaces, is a perfect illustration of Don Felice’s description of public space as akin to a river which is always flowing and always new. It is indicative of his insistence in using metaphor to represent something which, because so ephemeral and interactional, is especially hard to explain and define.

Before turning to the text, I would like to point out that some aspects of Catholic theology informs not only Don Felice's ideas on public space (and I believe, mine as well), but also and more subtly the very practices of its construction that we both employed during our walk. In the Catholic thinking I grew up with, and that I recognized in the ideas of Don Felice, public space is significant as a place where people can realize their community with each other guided by the ideals of tolerance, brotherly/sisterly love, charity and redistribution. It is important here to note that this does not correspond to most of the actual churches, parishes, or religious communities’ practices and roles in Milanese society - let alone the institution of the Catholic Church, that has rather promoted hierarchy in city spaces. However, Christian philosophy is a source of idealized conceptions for many of the people I encountered, including several Terre di Mezzo members.
More specifically, during our walk, Don Felice told me that public space is based on "the word". To understand this, we have to remember that "the word", as both a specific message (usually the recommendations of the Gospel), and more generally as communication, enunciation, storytelling, and dialogue, is seen in Catholicism as a transformative, productive, and creative force in society. This aspect was quite significant in our walk. If our itinerary did conjure public space and help realize its fleeting presence, it was mainly through communication as a creative and productive moment of encounter. That is why dialogues with people along the way were an important part of our walk. They were part of the creation of a temporary community, which could be the basis for realizing public space. This way of building public space also contributed to the idea of the latter as unstable and shifting, processual and performative. While I found this way of approaching public space illuminating, this focus on the 'word' might make it harder to see other ways of conceptualizing public space - such as the one of Social Centers, who can be better described as a flexible heterogeneous network than a clear and shared community, and whose view of space is centered less on the role of communication between subjects who can speak the same language, than on political conflicts and sustained historical struggles.

One time (…) another Mexican friend of mine came here, who had been here eight years ago. And I tell you: we went walking though the same streets that I always take (…) and he told me: Look, I am surprised, because I got to know a Milan that I did not know. In the sense that he started to know, for example, the space of the Naviglio (…) or also the Brera area, or even San Sempliciano that is also very beautiful, or this other side (…). But I tell you: I still have to learn so
much about the city, but [I learn about it] through the work that I do, or the journey that I do every day, and the way in which I relate to the city, both by going through its open spaces, and by going underneath it ... in the subway ... because for me it is also interesting to get to know the city under Milan, (...) because (...) it is a great majority [of people] (...) who move underneath. And even there, I find very interesting [how] public space constructs itself: with the newspaper stand, the café (...), the small booth to take photos. Also all the people who come to sell – someone [selling] an umbrella, someone a CD (...). The space underneath is, according to me, a mobile space. [For example] the café usually does not have tables, no (...) it adapts itself to this space [which] (...) is always a space with people who pass by (...).

I met Don Felice at the metro station, and from there we walked to the Faculty of Theology where he studies\textsuperscript{16}. When we arrive to the Faculty, we enter the bookstore. (...) There Don Felice sees a friend, a priest from Ghana. He introduces me to him, and explains that I am a student doing research on public spaces. Perhaps one day you could talk? He suggests. He has been in Italy longer than me, he can tell you about public space. (...) From the bookstore, we pass through a door which goes to the other part of the building, where lessons are held. I hesitate: I am not sure that I am allowed to go in, since I am not a student of that school. This is not supposedly a public space! But Don Felice urges me in, and there we are: in a beautiful monastery, with its cloisters, the hallways which smell old and grand and are adorned by paintings and sculptures, the grand stairs which are so incredibly quiet. Women and men are walking, or are sitting at the desks reading. We walk into the courtyards, which, as Don Felice tells me, used to be the monk's gathering spaces. I take pictures, although they do not seem very meaningful when I look at them later at home. We meet another colleague and student of Don Felice, Don Pietro [a pseudonym], who is here from Togo. Together we walk though the
hallways, through the huge doors made of dark wood and glass, and back out into the street.

Look, every place I have known it through a person. I think that this too is a way of appropriating the city. [Another way] (...) is walking by myself to discover (...) I for example always try to invent a new route. But the first approach [to a place] is always through a person (...) 

We walk to a café nearby, where Don Felice, Don Pietro and me sit at a tiny table with sandwiches, coffee, and apple cake. Don Pietro tells us about his work in a harsh neighbourhood in the periphery of Milan. He explains that many immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa he knows do not have time to use public space, because they are so busy working in small factories, juggling several employments.

After a short time, a man around 50 sitting at the table beside us joins in our conversation. Seeing the apple cake I brought with me and that I am offering to the two priests, he asks: “is that apple cake? I love apple cake”. “I am _”, he laughs, introducing himself. “I am an art restaurateur.”

Don Felice spins this at once into the issue of public space we have been debating: “If you are a restaurateur, tell us: how can we restore public spaces when they do not work?”

Everyone laughs, and nobody answers his question.

We leave the café, and promise to come back with more apple cake.

One time, I remember, I was looking for a CD. I had seen it the first time that I had been here [in the Naviglio canal neighbourhood], at around 11 at night (...) That other day I went to look for [the CD] at around 9 pm and no one was there (...) I came back later and [the CD sellers] were all back and I saw that after 9 pm this neighbourhood slowly starts to reconstruct itself, [it becomes] a small road in which not only CD but many other things are sold. (...) According to me the people who go around here, walking, according to me they are not ... not
many of them live around there. They all come from outside [this neighbourhood], they all come just to walk here (...).

Public space (...) constructs itself as a space which now it’s here and now it is not. For this reason I was telling you that these people [the CD sellers, the people who come to the small markets to see and buy], you find them in a place, then in another. It seems to me that in this way the city itself (...) starts to move, it is mobile in this sense.

(...) And because of this, (...) [the neighbourhood, and the public space that is created] becomes … how can we say it? We could say it becomes part of the river that passes through this neighbourhood. I think about [public space] like this: it’s like the river, like the water. The movement is always new, because (...) whenever I go there I have never found myself with the same people, it is always new people (...) it is a public space which is not formal, is not established, that changes (...)

[In this neighbourhood] people meet outside, walking. Indeed you see many people talking, but they never stop walking. One goes walking, goes to get an ice cream … one starts walking, circulating, promenading, it is difficult to find [somebody still], there are cafes and bars but people generally [move] (...) this is a sign that it is the people themselves who create public space.

Out in the street, Don Felice starts talking about public space again.

“Everyone seeks something in public space”, he tells us. I return to a space because I find what I look for”. On our way, we pass by a busy market.
I am fascinated by how the market effortlessly enters the conversation of the two priests, becoming a living, embodied example of what Don Felice was saying at other times, in other conversations. I am spellbound as I cross that edge from where public space is no longer a description and an argument, but rather a movement, a walking that I can remember, and/or a moment of poesis, and performance that also interpellates me affectively.

Pointing at the market around him, Don Felice explains: “In Mexico, in regards to markets, and other public spaces, we say this. (Usually) the earth, the asphalt is cold. But where there is a market, a public space, a space where people get together, the asphalt becomes warm”. As we make our way through an incessant river of people through the plaza, through the stalls, he continues his talk:

“Public space is a sand dune, because it is always made and always changes.
Not only for youth, for different subcultures.
People move and meet
in places and ways which are always different,
and [so they] construct different spaces.
Public space gets created in different places, in ways which are always different, it is fluid like people are who are moving”.

As we go on talking about public spaces, open spaces, and the importance of dialogue, the two priests stop and look at a huge commercial posted on the wall of one of the buildings surrounding the plaza. It shows an elegantly dressed man and the caption says: “I wanted a bank constructed around you”.

The image enters in the conversation just like the market before it: Don Felice and Don Pietro say that many people want the world to be constructed around them, and serving only their narrow immediate interests. And then, they seem to imply, how would society, and public space itself be possible?

Suddenly I realize that I have been in this exact same plaza a few weeks ago, with Francesca [see Chapter Six]. What she had pointed out to me of this plaza on that occasion, was not the market (it had not been there on that day), nor the commercial, but an historical building. I am shocked by the realization that a different context and set of ideas had made the plaza almost into a different place, that I could not recognize as the same one I had been with Francesca.
I can tell you about my living in the city (...) I have a veritable desire to appropriate these spaces, also to live better, no? In the sense that, at the beginning it seemed a foreign and very strange city for me. Little by little, however, every day I learn something new and this also helps me to appropriate its spaces and already it becomes for me a city known, and dear, so that I do not feel a stranger [to it]. But still ... the strangeness remains within me, because you are always in fact a stranger, no ... And this is also a topic that I am very interested in: how does one live as a stranger inside the city? (...) And this is interesting because this feeling determines also the way in which one lives and moves through the city, because for example, I as a stranger, it is very difficult for me to enter a restaurant because immediately people notice their own gazes, the marginalization, the exclusion that they [themselves] do [to me]. (...) Even the way they behave towards you, because you feel it at once. And I tell you: even the people of the city experience themselves [literally: live themselves] in many of these spaces as a stranger. You can find yourself with people who tell you: oh look, is since so many years that I do not come walking in this part [of the city]. I always ... my space is this: (...) the house, the church. [They live] a more sedentary life, more quiet, more in their house, and they almost do not go around [in the city]. And if they go around, it is always the mountains or the seaside.

Don Felice's words and our walk above emphasize that public space is made by people's movements, interactions, and use of city spaces. His story of the daily awakening of the streets by the river, with their continuous promenading, their market stalls, and the movement of people, each of them looking for something in the spaces of the city, elucidates beautifully the daily manufacturing of public space. Indeed the very walk in, through, and across different spaces - a walk
porous to other's people's comments, images, events, memories, and recollections - is a living example of this way of conceptualizing public space.

Don Felice's focus on the incessant construction of public space in daily life resonates with scholarly discussions on "representational", or lived spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). As a strategy to unravel and critically examine space, several authors introduce a distinction between space as material, produced location and space as a lived terrain, embodying diverse uses, histories, and resistances. Lefebvre, for example, compares dominant organizations and representations of space – forms which sustain a society's power structures and relations of production (see Chapter Three) – with lived and embodied experiences of places. These latter "representational spaces" are "linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life" (Lefebvre, 1991: 33), and they signify space as it is rendered meaningful and/or appropriated by people in their daily life. Lefebvre writes:

representational space is alive: it speaks, it has an effective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently, it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic. (Lefebvre, 1991 quoted in Dirlik, 2001: 17)

Lefebvre's distinction between representations of space and representational spaces is echoed by other scholars. Michel de Certeau (1994), for example, distinguishes between place as material, hegemonically structured locations, and space as the daily, lived embodiment of spaces by people enmeshed in the workings of power. Almost echoing Don Felice's narration and tour, he
represents space with what he calls the “long poem of walking” (de Certeau, 1984: 101):

The ordinary practitioners of the city (...) are walkers, (...) whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it. (...) The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. (...) The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces. (de Certeau, 1984: 93)

By comparing walking with speech acts, de Certeau illustrates how people living and embodying an urban place appropriate spaces, perform in and through them, and create relations between people and locales. These practices interrupt hegemonic structures and representations of space, both because they are hard to know and to control, and because they directly challenge existing spatial orders (de Certeau, 1984: 98).

Low (2000) also deploys a dichotomy between a lived character of space and the socially constructed material setting to theorize and research what she terms the “spatialization of culture”. In her work on the Central American plaza, she seeks to understand the relationship between the construction of places as repository of political meanings and of vehicles for social control and their on-going appropriation, contestation and signification by the people who use them. According to Low, public spaces are central to participatory democracy because they are always in the process of being made, remade, and reinterpreted. She distinguishes between the social “production” of space – the “social, economic, ideological, and technological” forces that “result, or seek to result, in the physical creation of the material setting” (Low, 2000: 128) – and the social “construction”
of space – people’s actual uses and “transformations of space (...) into scenes and actions that convey meaning” (ibid.).

According to Low, Lefebvre and de Certeau, urban spaces are structured and built to encourage certain uses, to transmit certain ideas, or to make possible certain conversations. As Don Felice explains, some areas of the city are more accessible to new residents of the city and lower income people than others. Some restaurants do not welcome non-Italians. At the same time, people’s journey’s through, uses, and interpretations of spaces interact with these dimensions of space, making the urban terrain unsettled and contested.

Don Felice alludes to this relationship between different kinds of spaces when he talks, for example, about the area of the Navigli. That neighbourhood, he says, is built around the canal and structured by it. Moreover, he notes that most of the people who are there at night seem to come from outside the neighbourhood. This speaks to the fact that this area has been gentrified: the CD vendors and many of the people who are “walking around” most probably cannot afford to live there. At the same time, by their being there, people build an improvisational, fluid public space that is only in part reducible to the formal and material characteristics of the built spaces.

Don Felice also describes the relationship between structures of public spaces and their “representational” component in a comment on the centre as a space structured by fashion retailing and the allure of brands. He explains that “this public space (...) is constructed by the (...) visible design and symbols of brand[s]”. According to Don Felice these images and this retailing, most of which
is unaffordable for many people, structures this space by giving it an elitist allure. At the same time, however, the expensive clothing shops cannot keep less desirable people and their wandering bodies away, because, after all, “the space is open (...) everybody moves, back and forth, back and forth”. In this context, says Don Felice, “to enter this space is like taking a bath in different brands … one comes out and says: so, I saw Armani, I saw [that other brand]”. While one’s experience of this place is inevitably shaped by fashion and affluence, the very movements of people in and out of it also contradicts its consuming logic and makes room for other understandings and uses of this space.

According to Don Felice, the way in which immigrants claim and occupy streets and plazas in Milan is yet another example of the daily reconstruction, reinvention, and appropriation of space by residents of the city. As he argues a few pages above, immigrants’ use of plazas render the latter “open” spaces – locations that are susceptible to negotiation and surprises. The practice of journeying through streets, avenues, and plazas as a way to get to know the city and its inhabitants (also described by Mohamed Ba in Chapter Seven) is a particularly interesting example he offers in this context. Don Felice’s words - and the enactment of this practice during our walk – suggest that the city is not simply a fixed place to be discovered and used by social actors whose identities are settled and certain. As de Certeau argues, a walk through the urban terrain has the effect of reframing both places and people.

One of Don Felice’s insights is that, because both public space and selves result from dynamic processes of creation, using and journeying in city spaces
can be a way of reinterpreting and re-writing diversity itself. Don Felice in fact reminds us once more that one of the pitfalls of discussing immigrant's experience of public spaces and how different groups use city locales, is that it can lead to essentializing diversity. Here I would like to return to Mauri, Cologna, Granata, and Novak’s observation that immigration in Milan poses the question of “how is a coexistence of different uses, of collective vs. individual and family uses of open spaces possible?” (Mauri, Cologna, et al., 2003: 231; emphasis in original). As the Schuster Youth have shown, however, this very question might depend on a tricky correspondence. If it is true that some immigrants communities use certain public spaces at certain times to meet as a collective, it is also true that while a group of Italians in public space are generally seen as ‘people in the street’, a group of, say, Latin-Americans is often perceived as a ‘noticeable group of immigrants’.

One reason for this association between urban space and cultural diversity is that public space is where people are visibly and experientially confronted with diversity. In a country where until recently the population has been quite culturally homogeneous, immigration does indeed change the way the city looks (Cologna, 2003). In turn, because of the role of public space to visibly represent the polis to itself, talk about public space becomes an important avenue for the negotiation of history and the identity of places (see Dines, 2002; Low, 2000). In this context, practices of seeing and ‘being seen’ do not simply refer to the way one looks like, but rather the way in which vision, as a complex
social practice, links one's presence to the seeing body of others (Pinney, 2002), who are themselves a representing and dynamic part of the urban landscape. At the same time, mainstream discourses on urban spaces that attribute unexpected, "different" uses of public space to an essentialized cultural alterity create a normal and normative form of public space. They construct public space as inherently European and White, and the uses "others" make of it as changing and reinterpreting it. In turn, because public space is seen as White, the uses Italians make of it are usually thought of as individual rather than collective, and/or pertaining to a shared cultural framework. This way of thinking emerges in both positive and negative versions. A negative one is the common complaint that immigrants are invading public space (see for example Dines, 2002; Maritano, 2004). A positive one, which however equally essentializes identity, is the comment I heard from several people that Italians do not use any more public space: they simply consume and/or window-shop, while “others” "really” use them. For one, this discounts window-shopping as a way of using and claiming public space. For the other, this romanticizes non-Italians as people who “still” veritably enjoy public space.

Don Felice instead looks at the city as what each person continuously discovers through journeys, stories, and encounters. In his words, the park picnics of Peruvian people are as “exotic” as the baths in the brands in the centre, or as the gathering of people by the Navigli, the canals that are one of the quintessential markers of Milanese identity. His question, how do we live as strangers in the city?, is linked with his observations that one is made into a
stranger to the city through acts of exclusion and discrimination, through structures fostering inequality, and through economic disparity. Moreover, Don Felice suggest that we look at being a stranger to place as something which all residents of the city share, albeit in different ways and for different circumstances (including because they leave it every weekend to go to the mountains or seaside). It is because public space is so unpredictable and replete of encounters, and because it harbours so many stories, memories, journeys, and relations of power, that even residents that have been in Milan all their lives can find themselves strangers to a particular space.

To conclude this chapter, as well as Part I of this dissertation, I am left with a metaphor: temporary like a sand dune, experiential like a warm feeling under walking feet, yet at the same time set and carved in stone like the beds of the Navigli, public space is hard to discuss and describe also because it consists of multiple layers and involves many different processes. This and the preceding chapters show that the ways in which it is built and organized benefit some people more than others, and are more conducive to some uses than others. The municipality does have the authority to forbid people from loitering in the streets. Immigrants without permits are more susceptible to public scrutiny and control than Italian, middle class participants of VivereMilano who rightfully occupy the centre to voice complaints about Milan’s dirty air or benches. Youth from the periphery who cannot afford to use the centre and its commodities might see no other option but using empty spaces leftover from an industrial past that, as
history, lives inside them yet is not very useful in a city fragmented by this change.

At the same time, public space is important as a shifting, ephemeral creation that different people continuously take part in. On the one hand, this means that, as Guano (2002) suggests, once groups and individuals do occupy and use public spaces, one never knows what the outcome might be. VivereMilano’s ambivalent relation with the political can in fact also be interpreted as a sign of the transformative potential of public space itself. Even if, and exactly because, not everyone has the same ‘right to the city’, public space is always in a sense unpredictable and dangerous. The Galleria and Piazza del Duomo, for example, is being used by a variety of people of different social standing and nationalities, and is indeed a highly contested location.

On the other hand, public space can also be described as a very complex conversation, in which each told story prevents others from being narrated. Viveremilano’s work of activating public space conceals the difficult position of the ones who cannot claim public space as easily as middle class white Italians. In turn, mainstream discourses about the place of immigrants in public space often depict a fundamental link between culture and ways of perceiving the city, thereby forgetting that if space is always constructed and in flux, so is also cultural identity and the very experience of strangeness. Last but not least, the place of immigrants in Social Centers remains largely unexplored in the literature on immigration and public space (see for example Caritas/Migrantes, 2005; Cologna 2003; Cologna et al. 1999). One of the effects this has is that Social
Centers are discounted from being “real” public spaces, and marginalized from the discussion on what Milanese public space might be for different people. In turn, without considering how the experiences, ideas, and demands of particular immigrant groups in Milan ally themselves with, or contradict the Social Centers, people like the inhabitants of the Plastic Houses might tend to become romanticized resisting subjects.

These complexities of public space remind me of Low’s (2000) brilliant anecdote on the many layers inherent in public spaces. Low discusses how Mexico City’s main plaza, the zocalo, is at the centre of conflicts between people interested in its Mexica indigenous ruins and the history they represent and people keen on preserving its colonial buildings. The zocalo’s colonial buildings, including the cathedral, were constructed during and after the conquest over the ruins of the indigenous buildings and temples. In recent years, however, due to a growing interest in these archeological remains, some colonial buildings have been destroyed to access the Mexica ruins and to make space for museums. Moreover, some of the remaining colonial buildings have been damaged because of movements caused by the archeological site itself. As the ruins themselves are rising “due to the removal of the weight of the colonial buildings”, “the temple’s re-emergence become a vindication of the indigenous culture that was submerged” (Low, 2000: 102).

The zocalo is a very interesting example of how public spaces are contested. Imagination, history, and memory are entangled in public spaces in complex ways. Like in the zocalo, the many layers of space can never be entirely
taken apart. They are so intertwined that we can apprehend their qualities only in
their dynamic interplay. Moreover, it is their constant, moving shifts which make
public spaces so interesting, contested, and alive. No one journeying through
them is exempt by power relations, by memory, and history. Yet this memory and
history is always incomplete, replete with other stories and uses that constantly
re-emerge through and in spite of it. In this ever-moving terrain, to talk about
public space always means to discuss a lot of other things and vice versa. It is
this messiness and entanglement of social relations and space, however, that
makes public space so significant for urban life.
PART II. CITY OF VISIONS
CHAPTER FIVE: THE VISUAL LIVES OF PUBLIC SPACES

In this, second part, of my work, I argue that vision, perspective, and (in)visibilities are very important aspects of public space in contemporary Milan. As in other Italian cities\textsuperscript{19}, in Milan "visual intermingling" (Pinney, 2002: 364) has always been an important medium for sociality and the negotiation of difference. A notable expression of this is the old practice of the struscio - the leisurely strolling in the central streets to see people and show one's (good) appearance.
Tied with concepts of gender, fashion, class, and diversity, the *struscio* entails an active seeing of people in urban space, and the performing of one's self so that it can be seen and become part of the social terrain. While the contemporary *struscio* is less marked and definite than in the past, as a wider visual culture it nonetheless permeates life in the streets.

The processes of de-industrialization that replaced factories with the production of style, fashion, and "beauty", have sustained and possibly expanded this persistent role of vision in social encounters. This does not only include people's engagements with fashion and style. As I discussed earlier, the tertialization that transformed Milan also shaped neighbourhoods and public spaces. In this process, it effected the actual and metaphorical visibility of particular subjects and locales, and sparked in turn tactics of resistance that are carried out and expressed in a visual idiom. Postindustrial empty terrains, for example, are sites where differently positioned social actors construct and deploy different kinds of visibilities and processes of concealments. Although the dismissed areas are not, strictly speaking, a public space, as we have seen in Chapter Three they can become one, and they generate important debates on the nature and roles of public spaces and on the politics of urban development.

Visibility is also a crucial way in which many immigrants enter the public sphere and negotiate their claims to the city. Public space is one of the sites where some of the people who think of themselves as "Milanese" perceive some residents to be "others" both because they look differently, and because they use public spaces noticeably differently than Italians do. As I discuss in Chapter Six,
these perceptions are themselves tied to complex practices of looking and of self-representation. Who does the looking and noticing, from which points of view, and in which contexts, is one of the issues that needs addressing. In this and the following chapters, then, I am concerned with the following questions: How are ways of seeing and appearing connected to different people’s uses and understandings of public space? How do landscapes mediate the powerful discourses and practices that shape both places and identities?

Visual anthropologists have shown that vision is a complex social practice with political consequences (Pink, 2001; Banks and Morphy, 1997). Opposing the idea of a transparent, innocent, and objective vision, many scholars argue that the very act of seeing helps constitute the world around us (MacDougall, 1997). Taylor also points out that looking includes noticing what is “given-to-be-seen” and ignoring what is supposedly invisible (Taylor, 1997: 98). Similar things can be said about the concept of landscape. Tracing the genealogy of this term within geography, Rose argues that landscape is a way of seeing which we learn”, “a gaze which itself helps to make sense of a particular relationship between society and land” (Rose, 1993: 87) – and I would add between people and places. Every landscape is actively constructed by an act of looking, which makes visible certain things and excludes others from the picture.

Rose uses the example of landscape painting to explain these ideas. From the Renaissance onward, artistic conventions worked with survey techniques, geometrical skills, and mapmaking to ensure appropriation and ownership of space. So, “merchants often commissioned paintings of their newly
acquired properties, and in these canvases, through perspective, they enjoyed perspectival as well as material control over their land" (Rose, 1993: 90). These paintings provided a single fixed point of view, located in the bourgeois individual, while at the same time under representing wage workers. With their ample vistas, landscapes could also celebrate " in visual form the freedom to move over property which only landowners could enjoy" (Rose, 1993: 91) Furthermore, by depicting women differently than men, they also cast women as part of the landscape and naturalized their reproductive role.

In contemporary times and in an urban context, Pratt describes how the geography of her home town embodies a landscape authored by the white, heterosexual, masculine subject as the unifying centre of identity, and thus naturalizing race, gender, and class boundaries. This is how she recounts the realization that her very way of looking at her city corresponds to a particular point of view, namely ‘what her father wants her to see’:

What I would have seen at the top [of the courthouse tower, where her father has taken her to have a look on the city]: on the streets around the courthouse square, the Methodist church, the limestone building with the county Health Department, Board of Education, Welfare Department (my mother worked there), the yellow brick Baptist church, the Gulf station, the pool hall (no women allowed), Cleveland’s grocery, Ward’s shoestore: then, all in a line, connected, the bank, the post office, Dr. Nicholson’s office, one door for whites, one for Blacks … I was shaped by my relation to those buildings and to the people in the buildings, by ideas of who should be working in the Board of Education, who should be in the bank handling money, of who should have the guns and the keys to the jail, of who should be in the jail; and I was shaped by what I didn’t see, or didn’t notice, on those streets. (Pratt, 1988, quoted in Rose, 1993: 157 – emphasis original).
Pratt and Rose suggest that there are no neutral landscapes, either of the country or of the city. We construct images of places according to what can be seen and by whom. Rotenberg envisions this as “the complex relationship between the city as place and the city as imaginary” (Rotenberg: 2001: 7), whereas different social groups and different people imagine the city differently and/or seek to produce a particular image for it. Rotenberg writes that European cities at the turn of the twentieth century tried to reimagine themselves “in a bourgeois image”. This happened as the rising middle classes sought to claim the city for themselves by creating a particular visual landscape, a representational and symbolic space modeled after the Paris arcades. The most visible barriers in the city became the most transparent ones: the aesthetic of desire which separates classes permitted some people to be shown and others to look on:

The Paris Arcade (1822-37), the first ‘mall’, used glass windows to display luxury goods, especially fashion, in ways that evoke fantasy and desire. [...] The transparency of the windows separated the real from the imaginary and the consumer from the object of desire. The approach was soon imitated in other cities. Owning such a suit of clothes converted the fantasy to concrete signs of class membership. To participate with others in the ownership of such fantasies was to realize an identity [of being upper middle class] that was truly exceptional and enormously satisfying. [...] In the Arcade, the glass window accomplished the boundary between the object and the one who desires it. In the city, other mechanisms would have to develop to create symbolic transparencies, enabling some to consume and others to merely watch and desire. (Rotenberg: 2001: 11)

In cities such as Vienna and London, this was done by creating new, clean, respectable neighbourhoods and separating them from poorer areas of the city that were cast at the periphery. “In the end”, what was “made possible was the
consumption by some urban residents of street addresses and other commodifications of space that fed their sense of exceptional identity, while others, both co-residents and provincials, could merely look and desire” (ibid.)

What I find particularly interesting in Rotenberg’s work is his insight that those transparent divides are distributed within the city. It is the very lives of people and their positions in the city that draw together vision, knowledge, aesthetic, and desire so as to (re)construct, shift, and reinterpret boundaries within the urban terrain. In other words, inhabiting the city always entails adopting (a) particular range(s) of vision, while at the same time also participating in a multiplicity of landscapes, authored by different people/social groups and their points of view.

This is also evidenced by Guano’s ethnography of the Italian neighbourhood of La Boca in Buenos Aires. There she examines how its middle-class Italian residents deploy “visual maps”, narratives and itineraries of the neighbourhood in order to manufacture “a sense of place” which privileges them over poorer, contemporary mestizo immigrants. In La Boca, writes Guano, “the dominant ‘maps’ (...) strove to monopolize the visitor’s gaze through the visual display of Italian heritage” (Guano, 2003: 360). The latter is represented through mosaics, statues, and murals depicting old-time Italian immigrants through their hard work, appreciation of music and art, and respectable family lives. At the same time, what Guano calls “tours” - practical tips and stories on how to move in the area - warn visitors against poorer mestizo residents and direct them to “safe” itineraries through sites sanitized by a large middle-class presence”
These “spatial narratives and practices” (Guano, 2003: 371) work in conjunction with the visual culture promoted by middle-class boquenses to shape ideas of who should belong and how to the neighbourhood and its community.

The insights of Guano, Rotenberg, and other scholars interested in cities and their visual cultures, are particularly helpful in my project. Drawing from this literature, in Part II, I will trace how some people I met during my research used practices of seeing to imagine and situate themselves in Milan’s social landscape. In Chapter Six and Seven I will follow three city walks I was guided in - by Maria Anacleta, who migrated to Milan from the Philippines, by Francesca, a white middle class woman, and by Mohamed Ba, a Milanese who came to Italy from Senegal. These itineraries show that my interlocutors’ social positions shape and are shaped by their perspectives on the city and the ways in which they can participate in its fields of vision. Mohamed, Francesca, and Maria Anacleta use Milanese landscapes as an important way to participate in public space. In turn, by claiming and imagining a space for self and others, their visual and performative engagement with the city helps reinscribe and/or challenge social categories.

Before discussing these walks, however, in this chapter I want to reflect on how several groups concerned with inequality in Milan and with its spatial politics adopt a language of (in)visibility to talk about poverty and urban renewal. Their insights inspired me to think of vision as a helpful framework for analysis. In section III of this writing I review the idea of invisible subjects proposed by Naga, Zenobia, and Terre di Mezzo, and talk of the spatial ghosts of the postindustrial
urban terrain. In this chapter I also present a series of captioned pictures of Milan. I chose to include them here to convey to the reader a sense of the impacts that some Milanese landscapes might have on those who see them (of course we are talking about different impacts for different onlookers), and some of the “visual interrogations” (Edwards, 1997: 53) these might generate. Freeman, in his visual exploration of the culture of politics in Buenos Aires, shows that the “face” of the city is a crucial part of people’s experience of public spaces. This is not only because residents see it all the time. It is also because, by framing and presenting things-that-ought-to-be-seen and concealing others (see Gordon, 1997 and Taylor, 1997), it mediates particular discourses, uses of spaces, social categories, and processes. Similarly, what I wish to suggest is not only that the way the city looks is a useful part of its description, but also that the visual can be a point of departure for investigating ideas of public space, structures of power, practices of being in a city, and ways of belonging, which might otherwise remain undiscussed.

These images also work towards formulating a question that particularly interests me: how do images, and modalities of looking and appearing of/in the city create, so-to-speak, a heteroglossia of vision, by inhabiting the same locales, being in a sense superimposed on one another, and existing together with many other ways of seeing as well as with narrative articulations of vision and aesthetics? To make an example, if the Duomo cathedral and its plaza are filled with billboards, and the Duomo square is also at the same time a place where people grapple with the visible signs of diversity in public space, how do these (at
least) two ways of looking and uses of aesthetics exist side by side? Although we could argue that they are completely unrelated, during my research I was struck exactly by the subtle connections between modalities of seeing that at first sight had nothing to do with each other.

Consider this example: last year, in Corso Buenos Aires, a major shopping avenue, contoured on both sides by international brand stores such as Benetton, Stefanel, Zara, and HLM, a retailer of electronic goods hired two models to squeegee for a day in order to advertise its products. The two blonde women, dressed in tight shorts and tank tops carrying the Kenwood logo, stood at a set of lights and washed the windshields of cars that were transiting through the Corso ("Modelle Lavavetri", 2007). Although the women's work and the looking they elicited belonged to the universe of the catwalk, and actresses on commercials, it is hard to ignore the way they also reminded passersby of the regular, familiar squeegees in Milan, and of the very different reasons and effects that their visibility entails. The latter are usually visible minority immigrants and/or Roma and Sinti people. It is interesting that the actions of the two models have supposedly nothing to do with regular squeegees, yet in fact work exactly because of people's experience with the latter. Indeed the more we think about it, the more complex it becomes. The pun of the models echoes and changes the asymmetrical looks involved in squeegeeing – something which, from the point of view of the driver, is usually uncomfortable also because of the mutual gaze it seeks to establish, and because of the difficulty of avoiding the attention of an
“other” who most people wish to be invisible; an “other” who, of all things, insists on clearing the windshield so we can see better what is going on around us!

This anecdote suggests that modalities of looking might be so significant for public space because they are always multiple and interconnected. Returning to Dines’ 2002 work on the Neapolitan Garibaldi Plaza (see Chapter Four), it is telling that the displaced immigrants are at the same time intruders in Naples postcard images and important referent points for the negotiation of an Italian-Neapolitan self-representation. One of Dines’ insights is that the people who look are always also representing themselves for others. Because of this, vision matters in urban locales never in straightforward way, but rather through complex processes of mirroring, representation and concealment. Public space, and people’s cultural/social bodies in it, become a “dynamic site where many gazes or viewpoints intersect” (Lutz and Collins, 1993: 187).

McLagan (2002) grapples with a similar question in her illuminating essay on Tibetan activism and the politics of representation. Focusing on the New York events for the “Year of Tibet”, she reflects on the multiplicity of ways of seeing in interlocking contexts, and poses the question, so to speak, of the translatability of vision. McLagan describes how Tibetan refugees, immigrant, and activists in the U.S. have to work with mainstream North American media in order to create visibility for their cause. As the author describes, activists have to fit their messages and goals into certain “media frames, which require certain kinds of performances” (McLagan, 2002: 106). In this situation, cross-cultural as well as religious differences (such as between Buddhist and non-Buddhist activists)
complicate matters and "pose all sorts of problem of translation" (ibid. 98). One of the central issue, argues McLagan, is how differently positioned people have varying understandings of "the efficacy of visual spectacle" (ibid: 107) in relation to Tibet's geopolitical situation. Because of this, practices of seeing and representing become a juncture from which to consider questions of subject building, positionalities, activism, and contemporary notions about Tibetan culture.

I find McLagan's analysis intriguing, because it suggests that vision always occurs in, and runs into, complex issues of translations between contexts that are not just connected but often hierarchically related to one another. If we want to discuss how vision works in specific contexts, we need to do two things at once. First, we need to reflect on particular visual cultures, situated practices of representation, and the specific social positions engendering and engendered by them. Secondly, we need to pay attention to how ways of seeing travel and matter across different but connected social spheres. To return to our example, the visual politics involved in squeegeeing in Milan interpellate people's various experiences with difference, gender, and sexuality. As they travel from one domain to the other, they do different things and have different meanings. Yet, at the same time, the way in which privileged subjects (men in cars) can deploy vision (can gaze at) consumable female subjects, also confirms that poor immigrant squeegees are undesirable bodies in public space²¹. Public space here is so to speak the terrain that makes the shifting and travelling of vision possible. By taking these dynamics into account, visual practices can be a
starting point for analyzing how images, (in)visibilities, and lived landscapes help consolidate places and identities.

Here I want to emphasize that by saying that vision is an important aspect in people's relationship with public space, I do not intend to argue that it is the only nor the most important of the senses involved in urban life. A visually impaired person I talked to in Milan, for example, described the city as a space constructed by echoes, noises, and sounds, and Sasaki (2000) explores tactility in Tokyo. The taste of coffee I shared with people, and the smell of the roasted chestnuts sold in many streets were a strong presence every day in my fieldwork. In fact, in this dissertation, I am interested in vision not as a distant, static manner to relate to built environments, and disconnected from other sensual experiences of the city, but as a practice of seeing which is dynamic and embodied, and shaped by the very movements of the seer within the landscape. Such a framework is particularly relevant in Milan, considering the ways in which seeing/appearing matter in public space - including the legacy of the struscio, the important effects of fashion and design as a cultural, economic, and social force which operate also through visuality, the connection between alterity and (in)visibility, to name some of its aspects.

The struscio itself could be an example of practices of seeing which instead of distancing the body, links it to the seeing body of other people, and to their journeys in public space. Pinney (2002), in an article about darshan (the religious viewing of the images of Gods and Goddesses) based on fieldwork in India, writes that a "corporeal visuality" (ibid.: 356) might be present in similar
forms in perhaps all societies. Paying attention to what he calls the "mutuality and tactility of vision" (Pinney, 2002: 355) would interrupt ways of conceptualizing vision as typically "disembodied, unidirectional, and disinterested" (Pinney, 2002: 359).

To start thinking about the linkages between embodiment and vision, I would like here to read Sasaki (2000) and Rotenberg (2001) in a different way, almost 'against the grain'. In his article, Sasaki refers to Tokyo to argue that tactility is more important than vision for the daily life of city users. "Visuality," he writes, is "the viewpoint of the visitor to a city, and tactility (...) that of its inhabitants" (Sasaki, 2000: 36). However, it is interesting how his examples actually suggest that tactility, actual journeys, and lived urban experiences might be inextricably linked with visuality and shape vision itself. Sasaki describes how in Tokyo the main objects of the landscape, such as the two main mountains and the sea are "thrown far from the centre of the city, to the surrounding nature" (Sasaki, 2000: 39). Within the city, it is the tactility of hills that is importantly felt by its inhabitants, such as the effort of climbing them, and the sense of protection of being in their valleys. However, Sasaki also writes how the views from the hills (which are experienced in a very tactile way by the inhabitants) are important in characterizing these places. He recounts at least eight "typical place names (...) which mean 'place or height or slope from where one can see Mount Fuji' (ibid.), and eight more signifying "slope from where one can see the sea" (ibid.). Moreover, he explains how the visual landscapes around the city actually permeate city design. He writes:
There is a basic strategy in gardening, ‘shakkei’, meaning ‘borrowing scenery from outside the space of the garden’. If we make a garden near mountains, we design it with these mountains as its background. We could say that Edo [Tokyo’s old name] was designed with the views of Mount Fuji and Mount Tsukuba as its basic shakkei. (ibid.)

Sasaki could then also be read as a caution to pay attention to the tactility and embodiments behind vision, and enabling visuality in the city.

Rotenberg can be seen to point to the linkages between vision and embodiments from the opposite direction. As I indicated above, he argues that particular visibilities helped to “re-imagine cities in a bourgeois image” (Rotenberg, 2001: 7). In London, Vienna, and Paris, new commodified spaces created a transparent divide, which acted as a sort of glass arcade (see Rotenberg, 2001: 11). While inviting people to “watch and desire” (ibid.), it separated and excluded them from the “exceptional identity” (ibid.), and the privileged street addresses of the newly self-defined bourgeois classes. What is interesting here is that the very invitation to see constructs people as separated, literally, as living ‘somewhere else’. The very acts of seeing and desiring “embodies” them, because it contributes to the shaping of city spaces, of people’s journeys, and of actual uses of the city. Here I am reminded of Caldeira’s (2000) city of walls, in which physical separations and the material constraints on public space shape what can be seen - and in which visual surveillance shapes people’s journeys and makes the body in space matter.

In considering how vision shapes embodiments and the construction of identities in/through the urban terrain, and how embodiments and social positions enable vision, in this second part of my dissertation I theorize landscape as a
dynamic part of people's relationship with public spaces. I am interested in
developing a notion of landscape that would be akin, metaphorically, to air or
water. Like air, a city landscape connects people, it is hard or perhaps even
impossible to chart, yet it nourishes life in the city. Just like water, the cityscapes
we see are never fixed, but constantly change, flowing through spaces and
lending them vitality. To say it with Tsing (2000: 327), the currents of rivers and
canals allow us to analyse, at the same time, the movement of the water, and the
way in which its flowing shapes the channels through which it travels.

II.

The following videophrames and photographs are examples of some of the ways
in which visuality emerges in and effects public spaces, and participates in
people's relationship with the urban terrain.

Carnival in Milan

People in costumes parade in front of onlookers, as models stare at both the
carnival personages and the watching crowd from a giant billboard. (Both
traditional Italian, as well as “foreign” costumes were part of the scene, although
we do not know who is under the dragon mask, and whether it is meant to
represent otherness, or cultural identity.)
The advent of Carnival week in February 2005 added one more dimension to the multiplicity and "mutuality" (Pinney, 2002: 364) of gazes in public space. Moreover, as the carnival masquerade was not limited to the parade, but was diffused in the streets of the centre, the difference between the looking/being seen of carnival goers and of the people who were window shopping and/or doing a little bit of *struscio* was just a matter of degrees. Masked persons were entering shoe stores, carnival figures were showing their attires not that dissimilarly as they would a nice dress, and shoppers alternated looking at costumes, at stores, and at people walking in their fine weekend clothes.

**Difference and visibility in the Duomo Plaza**

![Figure 21](image)

A "Chinese bride".

What makes this bride "Chinese" in the eyes of many Italian-Milaneses is her very presence in this particular space. Many people in Milan are amazed at the fact that a new bride would go in the Duomo Plaza, and "get her dress all dirty"
among the pigeons. While this practice by some residents of Milan is influenced by Chinese bridal customs of visiting status places in the city (Cologna, 2005; personal communication) all complexity, historical variations, and contextual specificities are lost in the simple characterization “Chinese bride”.

Several of my interlocutors pointed out “groups of immigrants” like this one as a very obvious presence in the Duomo Plaza. But why are they so noticeable? Their visibility arguably derives from their use of public space (it is usually younger people, and not middle age men who stand near subway entrances), as well as their appearance. In this context, the latter does not simply mean how they look like, but rather the way in which they participate in the shared visual landscape. Compare them for example, with the three men on the right side, who are “looking Milanese” by walking purposefully and well dressed right in the middle of the Plaza.
“Caring for” public space

An Armani ad hanging from the side of a building bordering a small green public space. On the left side of the grassy area, a telephone booth is also covered in an Armani ad. The small white sign on the grass reads: “Here the green [the grass and the plants] is cared for by Emporio Armani”.

The overwhelming presence of Armani in this plaza constructs and deconstructs public space. Fashion, by investing (in) and inhabiting public space, influences the city landscape. Conversely, it is often by meddling with the visual feel of a certain place that advertising (in various forms, including screens playing videos from the windows of shops, and from building facades), retailing, and other aspects of the business of style transforms and effects public space.
As Francesca taught me (see Chapter Six), shops and streets mirror and embellish each other, playing with the very boundaries between public and private. De Lucchi, for example, who designs both service and retail shops in Italy and internationally, describes his role as an architect to “create a rhythm”, a “game of opening and closing” between the stores and the streets. He uses glass panels and windows as a way to create “spaces which seem an extension of the sidewalk and which enter into the architecture, and spaces which, on the opposite, establish a complete separation between the material [of the street] and the inside [of the stores]. According to him, “the real issue is not closing, but rather opening, and in all my projects there has been a commitment to take away the burden (lit: the embarrassment) of the threshold”. (De Lucchi and Villani, 2004: 73)
The interplay between stores and streets interpellates city dwellers at both sides of the glass divides. Here, people and mannequins in a boutique appear to an onlooker, and a reflected passersby steps out of the shoes displayed in the window.

A composite image of Gucci, in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. This Gucci consists of a fashion store and a connected sidewalk café, where waiters wear black and look/move like models and/or actors."
The Gucci café makes the shop spill into public space (in fact occupying and fencing a part of the most central of all promenading spaces in Milan!) and creates an opening from the street to the interior of the store - almost inviting public space in. Wilson (1987) associates (window) shopping with theatre and spectacle. An interesting twist here, however, is the uncertain location of stage(s) and audience(s). Are the people drinking coffee in full view of the promenading crowd (and indeed in the same public space), attended by model/waiters/actors part of the show? And what about the promenading crowds itself? Who (and where) is the audience, and the performers? And who does not get (or refuses) to participate?

**Ghosts**

The dismissed areas can be seen as existing at the crossroads between different (in)visibilities. Although massive and numerous, they remain invisible, and render so also those who inhabit them and those who hope to profit from their redevelopment. Their eerie emptiness assumes different meanings and reflects different realities for differently positioned people and groups.
"It is pointless to decide if Zenobia is to classify between the cities that are happy or those that are unhappy. It is not in these two kinds that it makes sense to divide cities, but in other two: those who continue, throughout the years and the changes, to give form to desires, and those in which desires either cancel the city or are cancelled by it" (Calvino, 1972, quoted in Zenobia 2005)⁵.

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"What kind of case is a case of the ghost? It is a case of haunting, a story about what happens when we admit the ghost – that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present – into the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world. It is a case of the difference it makes to start with the marginal, with what we normally exclude or banish, or, more commonly, with what we never even notice. In Gayatri Spivak’s formulation, it is a case of “what … it [is] to learn, these lessons, otherwise” (Gordon, 1997: 24-25, quoting Spivak, 1992)."
Invisible people ...  

One of the things I found most interesting during my research in Milan, was how several groups and people in different circumstances and contexts used a language of vision and visibility in order to express changes in the geographic, cultural, and economic fabric of the city, and to reflect on social inequality. This is the case, for example, for Terre di Mezzo, a street newspaper and publisher of books on Italian and international social issues, and the association Naga, a

3 This third of three pictures is used here under (cc) Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0. You are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform it, and to make derivative works of it; under the following conditions: You must give the original authors credit. You may not use this work for commercial purposes. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.
medical team that travels to low-income, often illegally residing immigrants to offer free health care. In their report (Osservatori Naga, 2003) and articles (Terre di Mezzo, various dates), they talk about an “invisible” and underground “city to point out the social exclusion of many residents of Milan. With these terms, the two associations point out that the municipality and many inhabitants of the city treat low-income immigrants, homeless, and Roma/Sinti people, as if they were simply not there. While their rights and social realities are ignored, they are de facto excluded from full citizenship in society (Holston and Appadurai, 1999).

It is important here to note that this invisibility manifests itself differently for various groups of people in different circumstances. Simply distinguishing between people who are visible and those who are not is hardly helpful. Moreover, by equating invisibility with exclusion, we would find people who are totally marginalized, and people who are totally powerful. We might then overlook how powerful interests sometimes works better exactly by being invisible (see the Zenobia participants below). Vision can then be better described by Gordon’s words as “a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternatively by apparitions and hysterical blindness” (Gordon, 1997: 15, referring to Kipnis, 1988). As Gordon evidentiates, invisibility can include not being seen - for several reasons and processes - and ironically, being way too visible.

This idea can help us understand the contradictory position of some disadvantaged residents of Milan. As Mitchell (1995) also explains, homeless people are metaphorically invisible as social and political subjects yet are very -
indeed too - visible in urban public spaces. Their presence there does not correspond nor lead to a participation in society and in public sphere. In fact, the former negates the latter. In this context, homeless people's hypervisibility becomes a matter of "I see you are not there" (Gordon, 1997: 16).

Similarly, low-income visible minority residents of Milan are at times invisible and at times very noticeable, depending on where, when, and how they occupy plazas, parks, and streets. As the Schuster Youth described (Chapter Four), people's individual life stories and circumstances informs their relationship with urban spaces and thus the way in which they are present in public view. For many non-Italians city-dwellers, however, this is seldom conducive to them claiming a space in society – for various and sometimes even opposite reasons. A friend and colleague of Don Felice, Don Pietro (see Chapter Four) explained that immigrants that hold several jobs to make ends meet often do not have any time to use public spaces. Especially if they are employed in small factories or in private homes, these workers remain hidden from mainstream discourse (Caritas/Migrantes, 2005). Because their work keeps them away from urban places of visibility, it does not counter widespread negative perceptions of unemployed, "unproductive" migrants. Their absence from public view is also an easy alibi for politicians and municipal structures to do very little to track down abuses at work (Caritas/Migrantes, 2005), or to make housing more accessible.

On the opposite, many immigrants are perforce very present in public space. As the Schuster Youth discuss, this can result from some immigrant communities or groups using public spaces as sites where to link with conational.
It can also be because of an occupation which particularly invests public spaces. This is the case for street vendors, but also for some domestic workers. A migrant woman I met in the Scala Plaza, for example, described how she usually rests while waiting in streets and plazas between her shifts in private households of the centre.

Here I want to emphasize that in all of these examples, (in)visibility is not simply a metaphor for social processes. The argument I want to make in Part II is that - because in Milan embodied and situated practices of seeing are active ways to participate in public space - visibility, representation, and concealment are powerful social practices which invest material forces and imaginative work, in the tight embrace of place-making. As suggested in two of the pictures above, as well as in Chapter Four, being “a stranger” (as Don Felice has it) in Milan means very often to look “other”-wise. This can be a combination of skin colour, ways of dressing, and ways of using public spaces. The noticeable visibility of people who are perceived as non-Italian translates into alterity, constructing them as intruders and/or out of place in the eyes of many Italian residents (see Zajczik, 2005; Dines, 2002; Maritano, 2002). As Dines argues, because of this, immigrant users of public spaces are often the first to be displaced when it comes to urban renewal. Another consequence this can have is that middle-upper class Italian born people might prefer at times to retreat from public spaces, instead of sharing them with publics they do not feel connected to.
... in invisible spaces ....

According to Naga, many illegal immigrants are doubly invisible subjects, because they have to render themselves so. Their social marginality both perpetuates and requires them not to be seen and noticed. Their lot is made even more dramatic by the fact that they also inhabit invisible places. Many immigrants without papers in fact, occupy empty industrial premises in dismissed areas, or similarly abandoned sites. As Naga writes, these accommodations are generally without water, electricity, heating, and other services. The situation is mirrored by the lack of engagement from the part of the municipality, who according to Naga, defines them as “non-persons” and reasons that “as they are not regular [that is, illegal] residents in Italy, they should not be there, and thus they are not there” (Osservatori Naga, 2003: 36). Naga points out the stark contrast between the “immense spaces” (Osservatori Naga, 2003: 6) of these vacant buildings, where groups of usually 100 to 300 people try to create a home, and the necessity of not being seen – a need dictated by the illegality of the residence, by the lack of papers, but also by the disruptive incursions of the police or, even worst, of neofascist groups. Indeed, the very possibility to live in hiding in such a huge place derives from the peculiar status of these areas that work like gigantic “black holes” (Zenobia presentation, March 9, 2005) in the city terrain.

The participants of the workshop “Building Zenobia” have something really interesting to say in this respect. According to them, illegal immigrants who are the users of dismissed areas are not the only “invisible subjects” linked with these spaces. The rightful owners of these properties are also hidden, because
this is advantageous for their productive operations. One of the participants explains that in Milan, dismissed areas say a lot about global conflicts, that is of conflicts between invisibles. Because in the end, in the dismissed areas in Milan, there are two things happening: there are possessors [that is, users] and owners. The possessors are invisible because they are migrants, mostly illegal, and thus have to make themselves seen as little as possible. The owners, on the opposite, are invisible because they are the big owners, transnational ones (because there are some that are Italians, but many that are international), whose goal is to make themselves seen as little as possible, because so they can work better. So this conflict in the dismissed area – closed, invisible area – ([but] visible from up high, (...) [because] the black holes within Milan are very numerous, are very big) (...) are invisible to everyone because the subjects [of these conflicts] render themselves invisible because of their different needs. (Zenobia presentation, March 9, 2005)

The particular area that the participants of Zenobia focused their workshop and projects on is a perfect example. It is an ex factory between the municipalities of Milan and of Bresso, and it has been abandoned for years not because it is unusable or unnecessary, but in a sense because it is too valuable and thus the object of different and conflicting interests. It is owned by Auchan, a large private distribution company which seeks to build a shopping mall on it. The municipality
of Bresso, however, opposes this idea, as a big mall would disrupt the small retailing that Bresso has been supporting and promoting in its boundaries. The fact that a portion of this area is located outside of Bresso, in the municipality of Milan, renders things even more complicated (see Caronia, 2005).

Zenobia’s focus on the (in)visibilities of places, subjects, and interests is illuminating in more than one respect. First, it draws attention to the politics of urban planning and renewal in Milan, and how it has not benefited most of its population. As its participants point out, “Milan is a city filled with families who need [housing] on one side, and full of empty spaces on the other side” (Zenobia presentation, March 9, 2005). Secondly, it suggests that to understand some of the things that are going on in contemporary Milan it might be useful to examine the invisible links that sometimes exist between social subjects in the city. According to Zenobia, moreover - and I will return to this idea in the next chapter - these links do their work exactly because they are so difficult to see.

... and ghostly apparitions

Because of the invisible characters and hidden interests inhabiting them, the dismissed areas can also be thought of as “spatial ghosts” in the urban landscape. During one of our city walks together, Francesca, a middle-class Italian born woman (see also the next chapter), indicated the vacant, grassy space pictured below, and pointing to new developments already starting to take place in the area, she described:
"this is [the] Isola [neighbourhood], this corner here. It is full of small shops, cafes, pizza restaurants, night clubs" (March 15, 2005).

As Francesca’s words are directed at an empty lot, it is hard to know whether she is really just talking about the existing businesses and places in the neighbourhood, or whether part of her description also includes some of the things she imagines will spring up in this area. Francesca in fact continued by describing how the whole neighbourhood is “being cleaned up”, its old houses restructured, and new ones built. She moreover emphasized that this is an historical part of the city, and one of the oldest.

Francesca’s words stuck to my mind for a very long time, as for me they demonstrated, better than any other description, the way in which areas of the city change as they are imagined differently (see also Zukin, 1995), and how they acquire different images and interpretations as new inhabitants, urban projects, parks, and buildings move in. Moreover, the fact that to me this still was an empty weed land, and not a new neighbourhood or/and an old historical quarter of the city, emphasized the different interpretations and versions these
imaginaries might hold for different inhabitants and passers-by. Francesca's ability to see urban renewal in an empty lot is strikingly similar to the strategy of resistance and opposition employed by the organizations of the Stecca degli Artigiani, an occupied dismissed building in the Isola neighbourhood, to counter the gentrification of this very area, in which they have been residing for years. Both Francesca and the activist of the Stecca then suggest a way to look at the empty spaces of the city as a possible starting place for analysis, similarly to how Derrida saw the supplement as holding a central place in reference to that which it supposedly merely adds to (1976).

This map of the Isola neighbourhood posted by the organizations of the Stecca in front of its park reminds passersby that “you are here” (in Italian: “voi siete qui” – as is written in the map just by the red building), in a place teeming with life, social struggles, and histories, and not just in front of an empty green space that many want transformed into new developments. The red structure, number 1, is the Stecca degli Artigiani, and the other numbers around it refer to places once occupied by small manufacturing and industrial businesses (such as a soap factory, an ironworker, and an industrial depot), as well as to residential buildings constructed at the end of the 19th century.
As the map above recounts, the Isola neighbourhood has been a working class quarter of the city. One of its most significant places has been the Stecca degli Artigiani, a factory that was part of Siemens-Tecnomasio Brown Boveri (see www.lastecca.org), but had then been abandoned. Since the eighties, the Stecca has been used by several people and groups as a place for exhibitions and film screenings, a meeting place for grassroots oppositional associations, a political party headquarter, an occupied residence for a small community of immigrants, and a library—just to mention some of its uses. The park in front of the Stecca itself has also an interesting history, as it was created by the residents of the neighbourhood who wanted a green space instead of a new parking lot as was planned by the municipality (see www.lastecca.it; and www.cantierisola.org).

Currently, however, the whole Isola neighbourhood has been the site of a planned new development, which is meant to convert it into the so-called “City of Fashion”. Here and in its wider area, the Garibaldi-Repubblica, urban renewal will generate housing (new residences and the renovated old buildings), spaces for businesses, a new headquarter for the government of the Region, a postsecondary campus for fashion and design, and a Fashion Museum. The fact that this area is very close to the city centre makes such developments particularly enticing for private investors. According to lastecca.org, this development affects ca 1 million square meters and it will cost around two thousand millions of Euros.

Since 2001, the associations living in the Stecca have been opposing gentrification and the planned proposal on the ground that it would displace many
of its lower income residents, devalue the history of the area, and disrupt the
counter cultural activities hosted in the neighbourhood. The organizations living
in the Stecca were particularly opposed to the demolition of the building, to be
replaced by residential and office high-rises (this demolition finally occurred in
2007). As a way to gather support for this space and for the work of its
inhabitants, in 2005 the park in front of the Stecca had been hosting since three
years a monthly organic farmer’s market.

The park with the farmer’s market,
and the Stecca building on the left side.

The farmer’s market involved both the park and the Stecca itself, which on those
days was bustling with activities ranging from public fora and film screenings on
gentrification and urban renewal, to a free clothing exchange, to the preparation
and sale of a variety of international foods. One of the many activities carried
out in this context was a so-called “tour of the void”. This tour included, among
others, the Stecca, an abandoned comb factory, and “illegal gardens” on vacant
lands (from the flyer of the event, May 8, 2005). By showing the empty lots
which are only imaginatively filled with new developments, as well as the

197
buildings that exist and are inhabited, but many investors already see as demolished and replaced, the activists sought to point out the discrepancy between what is (not) there and what many imagine and plan there (not) to be. This of course holds true for both sides, as both activist tactics/dreams, and future development plans, are in part solely imagined and often not yet there. (Indeed, the real estate developers’ dreams might be said to be much more real then the former, as they are backed by regulations and capital investments.)

I believe that a contemplation of the void has an analytical significance here, because it suggests that the gaping holes in the city are not dead but rather productive places, sites where meanings and things are created, both for real estate developers and for oppositional groups. This is also why the workshop Zenobia contested the very word “dismissed area”. Veritable dismissed areas, they explained, are spaces which cannot be used because too polluted, and/or too costly to fix. Instead, dismissed areas in Milan are political “back holes”: they are traversed by “a whole mass of interwoven interests” (Zenobia presentation, March 9, 2005), both private and public/governmental, that prevent them from taking shape. Milanese dismissed areas, in other words, are the spatial ghosts of capitalism and real estate speculations.

This explains once again their peculiar (in)visibility. Milanese dismissed areas are akin to ghosts, because they are invisible to many, and in many contexts, yet they are starkly noticeable in their many apparitions. Moreover, as Gordon argues, it is by their very presence at the edge of the dead and the living that they have profound effects on society. As ghostly spaces, they return from

198
death as unsettled terrains. Their demise as factories makes them into very
precious grounds for new development, yet this very abandonment as industrial
sites also haunts them and the city, as they meddle with urban plans, regulations,
ownships, claims, and conflicting goals. Looking at these areas as productive
sites because void, instead of as empty spaces where nothing goes on, brings us
once again to look more critically at invisibility as a category which ought to be
examined, exactly because rendered so by particular social forces. In the words
of Zenobia:

this kind of reading we did it starting from the fact that we need
another city, we need to construct an alternative, an alterity within
this city, (...) so that inside this city mechanisms could proliferate
and be born, that would allow the re-occupation of these empty
areas. But empty not in the sense that there is nothing inside, but
empty of meaning. (...) What we want to give to the city is a deep
meaning, a sense that we can participate, we can regenerate the
territory. This kind of reading came particularly to the fore through
the experience with the Plastic Houses. (...) This occupation took a
building which had been abandoned for fifteen years, and put in a
living community, a real community, that then started to produce
that thing called 'city'. That is, it produced a recovery of the territory,
a recovery of the building - (...) we recently had a party with two
hundred people in a place that ten months ago was supposed to be
a non-place within the city, an empty space. But most of all, it
constructed intersections on the territory, it constructed contacts, it
(...) activated civil society. The support groups that gathered
around the Plastic Houses to discuss what is happening of Sesto
San Giovanni27 (...) realize that (...) [we need to be active agents
on the territory. This all opened] a public debate on the city, a
political debate on what is the right to housing (...). The right to the
housing is not only the right to a home, but also to communicate, to
move within the city, access to knowledge. It is a complexity of
rights. (Zenobia presentation, March 9, 2005)

I want to conclude this chapter with a brief glimpse of San Precario, because as
a social ghost it is strikingly akin, and indeed connected to, the dismissed areas
as spatial hauntings. Just like the latter moreover, San Precario is the source of
tactics of resistance inspired by the role and power of differential visibilities in Milan’s spaces. Let me then evoke one of its many apparitions through the hilarious description of Tari and Vanni:

Shoppers don't quite understand why there is a procession at the deli counter of the supermarket. On closer inspection the statue of the saint is a bit odd. First, the saint is dressed a supermarket worker. Second, it has too many arms. Third, it holds a telephone, newspapers with job ads, and McDonald's chips. The statue is carried on sticks by a group of young people, and a priest, a friar and a nun are with them. There is even a cardinal. They distribute saint cards: San Precario is the name of this saint. Most people haven't heard of him. But then the young people say a miracle has happened and there is a 20% discount on shopping today. And with prices going up every month - prices have doubled since the euro was introduced - and the superannuation money being always the same, and the grandkids who cannot find a job for more than three months even if they went to university and studied law... (Tari and Vanni, 2005, no page number; describing a scene in a Milanese supermarket, on the 29th of February, 2004).

San Precario is what I would call an apparitional figure, that is one whose power of representation and commentary relies in great part in the way it can alternate being present and being absent. One of the aspects that I find most interesting in this personage, in fact, is how it spans differently visible realms. San Precario is
most times invisible in the world, yet easy enough to find in the internet\textsuperscript{26}. This is not just by chance. It is rather a tactics and a strength, as its partial immateriality and invisibility is what makes San Precario so effective in "real" urban domains. To say it differently, like "real" saints, San Precario is powerful because it lives and expands into the heavens of spirits and hyperconnections. His borrowing from catholicism, a very powerful force in Italian society, and the peculiar (in)visibility it engenders, is what makes its sudden apparitions in contested urban locales (first and foremost Viale Sarca, which literally and symbolically united and distinguishes two sides of the neighbourhood in transition) noticeable and thus effective as social critique.

As an apparitional figure, a ghost in the capital system (see also Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003), and a haunting labourer in a city which is supposed to have no unemployment and the highest per capita income in the country, San Precario, just like the dismissed areas, teaches us that sometimes only what is ghostly or partially invisible can shed light on our social world. It is no surprise then, that the alter ego of San Precario is Serpica Naro, a "non-existent" stylist, invented by a group of fashion workers to draw attention to the precarious labor conditions in this field. The association \textit{Chainworkers} spent months creating a brand, a website, and media releases, so that Serpica Naro (an anagram of San Precario) could participate in the Fashion Week of spring 2005 and its official catwalk. This was a serious blow for the organizers of the prestigious event. Once the trick was discovered, it was already too late: Serpica Naro was already 'wearing social critique' on the catwalk, performing its trenchant satire on the
fashion system, the politics of appearance, gender, and labour relations in contemporary Milan.

Its video “pregnant lady” (which was posted on the Chainworkers website but was also performed on the official catwalk for the February 2005 Fashion Week), for example, features a young woman trying to hide her pregnancy - “a dirty secret just like that illegal little letter [a dismissal letter] which you had to sign [before being hired]” - from her boss through a “hidden belly-band” (www.chainworkers.it). In another video, clothing items and accessories help a young woman slip effortlessly from one poorly-paid, irregular part-time job to another, all while maintaining a façade of beauty, femininity and cheerfulness.

Serpica Naro casts clothing, accessories, brands, and styles as tools for a social performance which, in the end, is impossible or unsustainable for most women. More generally, Serpica Naro and other activists also indicate that the whole fashion industry in Milan, and the wider postindustrial economic and social structure it belongs to, can be seen as a performance that only some people can afford to play. The practices of seeing, looking, and showing it engenders have tragic consequences for the lives of many people and indeed contribute to make many residents of Milan and many of its spaces invisible or void. The economy of fashion, for example, depends on workers “without regular hours, without regular contracts, without paid overtime. Without careers and without future” (Devoti di San Precario, 2004). While rendering some bodies very visible in city locales, it causes other’s lives, histories, and dreams to slip into oblivion. Foot, for example, writes in this respect:
Milan today is a dynamic, glittering fashion capital which hides the dark side of the urban dream. The billions of lire [sic] that circulate around fashion shows, design weeks, advertising companies and private television are underpinned by immigrants working the ‘dirty’ jobs which feed this economy. These immigrants are often ‘non-people’, ignored by the political system (…), marginalized within the urban fabric, lacking in economic and political rights. In the kitchens, sweatshops, bars, and building-sites of Milan, these immigrants provide the labour that maintains Milan’s extraordinary post-industrial economy. (Foot, 2001: 181)

At the same time, however, Serpica Naro/San Precario, and the engagements with dismissed areas and invisible subjects constitute a way “to read the city” differently, and to invite people to “open the door onto” these places and use them as grounds for public debate on Milan. The critical interventions of the invisible can provide, for at least the fleeting instant before it is appropriated, a way to tell a different story and to show a different picture.
In this and the following chapter, I want to turn my attention to the walks of three of my guides through the plazas and streets of the centre. In the pages below, I will talk about the walking tour of Maria Anacleta, who migrated to Italy from the Philippines, and the one of Francesca, a middle class, Milanese-born woman. In Chapter Seven, then, I will discuss the journey of Mohamed Ba, a Senegalese man who has been living and working in Milan for the past seven years.

In addressing these itineraries, my goal is twofold. First, I argue that vision can serve to negotiate spaces of belonging in the city. By following Maria Anacleta, Francesca, and Mohamed Ba, I trace how they use practices of looking and being seen, as well as ways of recognizing, representing, and unveiling, in order to participate in Milanese public spaces. Here I want to point out that the ways in which my guides see the city – and, so to speak, activate its landscapes – are quite different from each other. During our walk, Maria Anacleta asked me to take pictures of her in particular places, and looked for passers-bys to take snapshots of both of us in front of monuments and in cafés. While these pictures depict Maria Anacleta as part of the city, they also confirm her distance from her family in the Philippines and thus become signs of a difficult journey.

Francesca, in her tour, actively seeks the beauty of streets, plazas, buildings, and window displays as a way to relate to her surroundings. Her
insights on the “look” of the city illuminates some of the ways in which fashion and design affect public space (see also Chapter Five). At the same time, this very engagement with the aesthetic becomes a way to reflect on her identity, and on other people’s positions in the city. In this context, I would briefly return to Foot’s characterization of Milan as a city with a beautiful façade “which hides the dark side of the urban dream” (Foot, 2001: 181, see Chapter Five). He writes: “Milan is a shop-window city, where the gloss and spark are only, and necessarily, skin-deep” (ibid.). Francesca’s itinerary suggests that this thinness might be misleading. While this industry does operate by concealing its relations of production, and it does put people on view by rendering many other lives invisible and dispensable, this contrast should not lead us to think about style and design as a false cover for a true underground reality. Francesca shows us that discourses and practices connected to beauty do shape public space in Milan and provide a language and visual culture for people to participate in it. Moreover, as I will discuss in the last part of this chapter, discourses and practices related to dressing also constitute an arena of negotiation for the place of diversity in public space. Its skin-deep allure, then, describes more what it sells, than the role it plays in Milan, (and the way in which it is connected to many aspects of the wider economy).

As for Mohamed Ba, whose tour I describe in the next chapter, vision is an important aspect of how he uses theatre to describe Milan and some of its history. While I am very much aware that performance includes much more that visual representation and witnessing, I find illuminating how his tour reframed
visibilities and invisibilities in the Milanese landscape in order to help his audience see the city differently. Like the other two guides, moreover, Mohamed’s tour links vision with embodiment and actual journeys in streets and plazas, indicating that seeing is deeply connected to people’s places in the city.

My second goal is to pay attention to what, in Chapter Five, I have tentatively called the heteroglossia of vision – that is how modalities of seeing, viewpoints, and differently authored landscapes interrupt, intersect, and/or echo each other. Let me explain. At first sight, the two women’s itineraries that I describe in this chapter seem unrelated. While Maria Anacleta pointed out the presence of Filipino people in town and the places which enable her to connect with them, Francesca talked about style, fashion retailing, and artistic heritage. This very difference, however, can be deceiving, because it resonates with wider discourses in town about immigrants being in, and using public spaces in ways that are essentially different from how Italians use them. In this context, as Guano points out, an attention to aesthetic, beauty and art can become a “privileged language” (Guano, 2003: 365) between people who see themselves as belonging to the city. While identifying a landscape and a way of seeing as specifically Milanese, it also creates “viewpoints” for ‘other’ people “from which (...) they can observe – and possibly consent to – the race- and class-specific qualities” (Guano, 2003: 359) of that landscape. For Francesca, seeing and enjoying urban “beauty” serves to claim a privileged connection to the city and a sense of being truly “Milanese”. Her itinerary echoes hegemonic discourses linking Milanese culture, art, history, and style with Milanese authenticity. Maria
Anacleta's itinerary, just like the commentaries of Don Felice and Mohamed Ba, contradicts some of these imaginaries, by eluding clear-cut articulations of identities in urban space. This suggests that different ways of seeing and being in the city by different people have to be put in relation to one another, because they all participate in negotiating who can be part of which spaces in the city and how.

**Maria Anacleta**

I met Maria Anacleta in the Scala Plaza in October 2004. I had been sitting on a bench, observing the coming and going of people and taking notes in my field diary, when Maria Anacleta approached me to ask me what I was doing. This initial encounter led to several other conversations, and to three city walks. During one of these tours, Maria Anacleta also showed me her home, and dictated the following text to me, to describe her arrival and her life in Milan (she dictated the text in English, and the words in italics refer to Italian terms she used):

I am a Filipina, I am [Maria Anacleta]. I came to Italy (...) with two of my friends. (...) I saw Rome, France, the Eiffel tower. My brother met me in Rome. Then I visited my Mom. My Mom was here in Milano [Milan], I saw her, I have been in the house with my mother and brother for seven months.

When I found a job, I worked in _ [a city a few hours South of Milan]. My employer in _ died, but my soggiorno [work and resident permit] was ready. I met many Filipino people here and
when I have no job, I work as a parrucchiere [hairdresser]: I cut their hair, and manicure them, to earn money.

Now, after 3-4 years, I am very lonely, I remember my family, I want to return, but I have to wait for the renewal of my soggiorno. I cannot go home without my soggiorno because without it I cannot come back anymore.

(...)

When I was in the Philippines, cutting hair was really my job. That was what I did. And I made my children study. (...) One of them is a nurse, one studied in the hotel business, and one is in computer. (...) My husband worked in Saudi Arabia for 5 years. I am in the Philippines, I am in my shop, I am cutting hair, together with my children. They are still very young. He worked in an oil factory in maintenance, as a power plant operator. When he finished, he came to the Philippine and I told him “ok, you are finished working, so I will be the one to work, I will be the one to go abroad because I haven’t been. (February, 17, 2005)

Filipino people are the largest immigrant presence in the city (Comune di Milano, 2004), and they represent the most important component of Asian immigration arriving in Italy today (Cologna, 2003, “Profilo …”: 45). Although family reunions and the percentage of children and youth are rapidly increasing, most of the Filipino nationals in Milan are still temporary, older migrants, and predominantly female (ibid.).
Several authors have emphasized that gender is a very important factor shaping Filipino migrations at both ends of their journeys. Zontini (2004) and Cologna points out that women in the Philippines are the ones who support the family, both emotionally and materially. They are "the real pillars of life of the community" (Cologna, 2003: 45). Emigrating and sending remittance home is considered an extension of the care for elderly parents, children, and other family members. Women who do not have children often send remittance for nephews and nieces (Zontini, 2004). Maria Anacleta for example, has been saving money not only for her children, but also for her grandchildren.

In Italy, the availability of jobs in personal services (household work and caretaking) and the fact that women are still seen as the ones who should 'naturally' perform reproductive work (cf. Anderson, 1999: 78-9) are further factors encouraging female immigration. In Milan, Filipino women are mostly employed as domestic workers, nannies, and as caretakers of elderly people. Zontini describes this as the "international transfer of care-taking' whereby the demanding and socially devalued caring tasks are passed on to poorer and more vulnerable women" (Zontini, 2004: 1133, quoting Parrenas, 2001). This both results in a racialization of care, and fails to challenge patriarchal relations in the receiving countries (Parrenas, 2001).

Filipino women in fact are taking on the caretaking duties of Italian middle and upper class women, who are pressed for time and energy by their double/triple shifts. The latter are often in paid employment while retaining an almost sole responsibility for childcare and for housework. Ironically, then, in Italy
and Southern Europe, “non-citizens” are central in “sustaining the European family as a viable social, economic and reproductive unit” (Anderson, 1999: 117). Caring for elderly people is a particular case in point. As the population in Northern Italy is aging, many Milanese women find themselves caring for both their children and their aging parents. As this development has not sparked any “comparable extension in public service or state financial support” (Anderson, 1999: 120-1), many Italian middle and upper class women choose to employ a migrant woman to fill in the gap (see also Merrill, 2006). Maria Anacletta describes:

When I first came here, I worked with Signora [Ms] _ in _ [a town on the seaside]. It was only a summer job, for three months. She spoke English, was 84 years old, and had no husband. She had two daughters. It was a very nice place. They had their own big house, with a swimming pool. I cared for the plants, cleaned the surroundings, helped her cucinero cook in the kitchen. I went with her when she went somewhere. On Sunday, my day off, I went to the parco [park] and saw many many Filipino people. It is near the beach and I saw that many Filipino people are working there. We came back to Milano and I found another job. I worked with a woman who was paralyzed. I accompanied her. Her husband was a Sicilian, a very good man. I was taking care of the woman. One day the husband was cleaning a chandelier, very up high and he fell. I was very scared, I did not know what to do. I called the ambulance
and I carried the man because the scala [ladder] fell on him. He went to the hospital and the woman was crying. They asked me what happened. I said I was in the kitchen when it happened. It was an accident. When he went to the hospital, they discovered that he had a tumore [tumor], and he died. After that, I took care of the Signora. (…).

After a while they changed me because I did not speak Italian very well. They changed me for a Peruvian or Ecuadorian. The daughter told me: “Maria Anacleta, I am very sorry. It is because you do not speak Italian well. My mother is alone now, she has no husband any more”. So I went to my mother and told her, “I have no job anymore because the daughter does not like that io non parlo bene, that I do not speak well”.

When I had no job I looked again for another job. I found another job and worked there, for Signor A. But again he got sick and in the month of August he died. I was not there. He died with his family. I was crying. I had no job again! They called me and said: “my father died in montagna [the mountains where he was spending the holidays], you can come and get your things.

My mother at the time was still alive. She died that year. It is very very hard, if you do not know how to speak Italian. Filipino here sometimes are lonely. Sometimes they have no job. Many Filipino are jobless. So they go to McDonald’s and ask other
Filipino to help them. (…) Sometime I go there [the McDonald's], when I have time and am not working, or I stay at home and listen to music. When I listen to music, all my problems disappear. Or I go to the call center in the metro and phone my husband, or my daughter in Manila, or my daughter in the province.

As Maria Anacleta’s words indicate, caring for older people as live-in help is a particularly difficult job in many ways. Because of the long, irregular hours, it leaves little free time and no space of one’s own to socialize with friends, exacerbating the loneliness many women already feel (Paltrinieri, 2001; see also the Schuster Youth, in Chapter Four). Maria Anacleta also felt that taking care of an elderly person did not particularly encourage her to learn Italian, making other, different employment hard to attain (see also Paltrinieri, 2001). Because of the age of the employer, moreover, it is perforce a temporary and uncertain position. As Maria Anacleta describes, when the senior in care passes away, the caretaker finds herself suddenly without home and without income and has a very limited time to find a new job and a new place to stay. In Milan, where there is a chronic shortage of affordable housing, these situations are especially difficult to resolve.

Working as live-in caretaker also means that the women have to leave their children behind, becoming “transnational mothers” (Zontini, 2004) for long periods of time. Phone calls and letters are an important way to stay in touch, especially since visits to the Philippines are often hard to arrange. As Maria Anacleta recounts, apart from the cost of travel, many women find it hard to
return home for visits because they need to have papers in order to be readmitted. The Italian immigration system has been criticized by both the media and by activist associations as being one of the worst organized in Europe, making papers hard to obtain and encouraging illegal immigration (Murer, 2003; Leogrande and Naletto, 2002). The difficulty in acquiring papers can be seen as one more way in which Italian society encourages a non-organized, low-paid and flexible pool of domestic workers. Because the granting of work permits depends in large part on the employer, it makes migrant women even more dependent on the families where they work and with whom they often live.

Maria Anacleta’s itineraries in the city and the resulting photographs reflect some of these issues and difficulties, as well as some of the resources available in the city. The tours we walked together and the pictures themselves were indeed a way to forge and strengthen many connections at once: to Milan, to the Philippines, and to other Filipino people in the city.
During our tours, Maria Anacleta showed me some of the sites she uses in her everyday life, such as one of the Filipino churches (Picture 5), an international calling centre (P. 2), the McDonald’s cafés, the newsstand where Filipino newspapers are sold, a bank catering to the Filipino community, and some of the central plazas where she spends some time when she is not working (P. 6). Maria Anacleta also guided me to some of the central attractions of Milan. Moreover, every time Maria Anacleta guided me in the city, she asked me to take pictures of her in specific places, such as in the middle of a street exhibition in one of the most popular promenades of the centre (P. 1), in front of the Duomo cathedral which is usually considered the symbol of Milan (P. 3), and in front of the Sforza Castle and its newly renovated fountain (P. 4). In fact, most of the visual itinerary of our walks consists of frontal, full view images of an elegant and...
smiling Maria Anacleta, confident and at ease in front of monuments, buildings, and plazas.

Maria Anacleta sent many of these pictures home to her family to show them the city she lives in, where she calls them from, and who some of her friends are. Pictures are one of the many ways for Filipino women to maintain "transnational families" (Zontini, 2004: 1117; see also Parrenas, 2001; and Wolbert, 2001). Zontini describes this as "kin work", the myriad everyday practices carried out by Filipina migrants which are crucial in nourishing ties between family members "in spite of great distances and prolonged separations" (Zontini, 2004: 1117). In this context, photographs are often ambivalent. Maria Anacleta's pictures, for example, denote a connection to Milan while also being a tangible sign of displacement.

The photographs of Maria Anacleta in front of some of the major attractions of Milan are also, literally, a way to place one's self within the urban landscape. As Mohamed Ba explained (see Chapter Seven), pictures are an important way to claim one's presence in a (more or less) new city: "the immigrant who arrives in Italy (...) finds her/his friends who the next day go and buy a roll of film, and where do they bring her/him? Here, in the centre of Milan" (March 26, 2005). These very pictures, however, can easily become a burden for a new immigrant, as they can create high expectations from his/her family members in the home country. Pictures in the city's 'status places' veil the difficult conditions most immigrants encounter, and the social inequalities that characterize life in Milan.
Maria Anacleta’s photographs are also the beginning of a map of the Filipino presence in the city. Public spaces like the central plazas and some parks, affordable cafés like McDonald’s, and some Catholic churches are important community spaces, especially since Milan offers few other sites where Filipino people can socialize (see Cologna, 2003). These pictures indicate that for Maria Anacleta, going around the city is also a way to meet and connect with other Filipino people, who, as she explains in the text above, are a tremendous resource for her and other new immigrants (see also Cologna, 2003). Filipino women often provide support for each other ranging from friendship, to small loans, storage of personal belonging, a place to stay, and help with childcare. One of the most important forms of assistance is helping other women to attain employment. Indeed, Maria Anacleta found most of her jobs through the help of friends. Her itinerary in the city, then, is also an ongoing, everyday practice of activating and maintaining connections crucial to her survival.

Last but not least, I would like to point out how the very activity of taking pictures in the city also added new dimensions to familiar walking routines. Equipped with a friend/anthropologist and a camera, Maria Anacleta could also transform a walk in the city into an activity associated with leisure and status. Maria Anacleta pointed out repeatedly that “we are just like tourists!” and just like “those people who have money” (November 8, 2004). The very practice of taking pictures in the city enabled Maria Anacleta (and me) to play a different role in the city for a day, and to inhabit urban space differently – making it easier, for example, to pose in front of police officers on their horses, as in one of the
pictures we took. Marta, another one of my guides, a young woman from Peru who combines care of an elderly Italian couple with other jobs, similarly told me that walking in the city and visiting particular sites helps her distract her mind from her everyday life, as it is a complete change from a routine of heavy and long work hours.

Marta’s and Maria Anacleta’s comments cause me to wonder: Is there ‘a way to be’ a tourist, Milanese, or migrant woman in Milan? And where do these practices and imaginaries come from? In other words, how are women’s identities constructed through their itineraries in the city, and through their practices of recognizing, using, reinterpreting, or rejecting certain ways of seeing?

**Francesca**

Very similarly to my encounter with Maria Anacleta, I met Francesca by chance in one of the central Plazas, as we were both resting on a bench and watching passersby. A white, Milanese born woman, Francesca described herself as middle-class. Between November 2004 and March 2005, Francesca guided me three times through the city, showing me her home and parts of her daily itineraries. These often follow a particular routine, which brings her through the major promenading routes, to a department store, to churches and art sites. As Francesca explained: “I love art and history (...) so I make a round of all the churches of the centre – I know them all (...) Oh the things I have seen!” (November 5, 2004) The following images are a visual excerpt of these tours.32
Francesca shared her love of the historic centre with me by guiding me through what she called “the heart of the city”. This included the central promenading routes (Photograph 1), churches from different periods (P. 2), monuments, and historic buildings (P. 3 and 5). While for Francesca urban beauty was mostly equated with history and art, it is interesting that shops were an essential part of it too. During our tours, Francesca pointed out stores with particularly elegant window displays (including jewellers, patisseries, cloth and fashion retailing), talked about “traditional” and/or historic shops (including a silver accessories
boutique (P. 4) and a pharmacy), and marveled at stores displaying stylish
designer and fashion artifacts (such as a ceramic mosaic tiles store (P. 7) and
several boutiques). Indeed, the seamless connection between beautiful
churches, heritage buildings and shiny window displays (P. 633) was one of the
most striking aspects of Francesca's itinerary and reflected a landscape
fashioned by style, affluence, and aesthetics.

As Francesca expressed it, “in the centre of town, one forgets poverty,
everything is beautiful, shiny.” “[T]here is the perfume of money”, and “a certain
type of people” who add to the ambiance (November 12, 2004). The latter,
because of their tastes associate themselves with certain consumption spaces
more than others: stylish, high-quality shops in contrast to more affordable ones:

If you appreciate certain things you automatically discard others. If
you (…) love what is beautiful, and high quality, you do not go to
Upim [an affordable, popular department store]. Because you would
not be able to find what you like. (…) In the Upim there is a certain
type of merchandise for a certain type of people, who is not me
(…). For me also the people who go to certain stores … [are part of
the atmosphere of an area]. (March 15, 2005)

According to Francesca, in the centre of town, the products displayed in the
shops, the (potential) customers inside the stores, and the passers-by looking at
the windows (just like Francesca and me in our itineraries) are all active
participants in the same aesthetic, style and allure. Moreover, in a wider
perspective, the landscape of a street or a plaza - with its churches, historical
buildings, and its traffic of bodies and images - adds to the style of the store, just as the latter participates in the visual feel of the public spaces which it contours (see also De Lucchi and Villani, 2004; Merlo, 2001). Francesca clearly sees herself, at least to a certain extent, as part of this landscape of allure: "I love what is beautiful (...) The beautiful also gives me the joy of living (...) I feel better (...) [with] the beautiful, the clean, the orderly, 'l'ultima novita' [the hottest and newest fashion]" (March 15, 2005).

Francesca's comments points out how women's engagement with consumption as both subjects and objects of beauty, as onlookers, audiences and performers, can play an important part in mediating women's access to urban spaces (see for example Del Negro, 2004). Fashion is a particularly interesting case in point. Shopping areas, store windows, and huge ubiquitous advertising which literally place the bodies of women all over town, both provide women with ideas, clothes and accessories to participate in the fields of vision of streets and plazas, and create 'feminine spaces' where women can safely and legitimately be in the city (see Bondi and Domosh, 1998; Blomley, 1996; Domosh, 1996; Glennie and Thrift, 1996). This of course has not necessarily been empowering for women. The very way in which (certain) female bodies have become such a central visual feature in so much of Milanese public space strengthens the suspicion that women more than men need to appear in order to participate in public space (see Ruggerone, 2004). This appearance is also always indexed by class and race (Soley-Beltran, 2004), making some women - like Francesca - fit more easily than others into certain landscapes.
Francesca's attention to the aesthetic qualities of the centre of town and its economies of looking and appearing is, moreover, part of a wider concept of beauty, which, encompassing art, tradition, and culture, could serve to identify "Milanese-ness" itself. An interesting slippage in fact seemed to occur in our walking conversations: since historical buildings and artefacts are usually considered beautiful, beauty emerges as a way to recognize and define things historical, precious and authentically Milanese. Francesca insisted that "all Milanese" should do as she does, using every occasion to promenade in the city, and taking different routes to discover the treasures hidden in unlikely corners, dark courtyards, and inaccessible palaces. Francesca was particularly proud of her ability to reach historical and artistic sites behind the closed doors of buildings and churches. For her, to know how to access those sites as well as the capacity to understand their beauty is part of living in the city, to be part of its culture and history, and to know how to use its resources to one's own advantage.

What interests me most here is how the very activity of seeing and walking through the city becomes a practice of engagement with urban locales and a way of negotiating one's identity. For it is the repeated, daily practice of searching, looking at, and "appreciating" the "beauty of style and history" that helps Francesca confirm her legitimate belonging in Milan. Here walking and looking make each other possible. Her daily promenading, seeing and recognizing certain landscapes confirms Francesca as a legitimate viewer/speaker, at the same time that her knowledgeable movement through the city puts her, literally,
in the position to see and discover art, history, beauty, and style (see Guano, 2003).

Particularly telling in this context was Francesca’s frequent use of the Milanese dialect, a language now only spoken by a few people, during our tours:

“This is an umenone,” [Photograph 3] she tells me, as we stop in front of a large stone statue of a woman who is busy holding the rest of the building on her shoulders. In our tours, Francesca often interjects words and sentences in Milanese dialect. Milanese seems particularly apt to describe Milanese things - such as the umenone. “Do you know what it means?” she asks, since she knows that I do not speak the dialect. “It means big man,” she tells me, irrespective of the fact that it is clearly a woman she is pointing to, “they are typical of Milan, the umenones” (Fieldnotes, December 15, 2004)

The Milanese dialect, once widely used in the city’s households, is today often associated with authenticity and with “real Milanese-ness”34. The very fact Francesca can speak it positions her as an authoritative speaker of things Milanese. In turn, the act of naming and characterizing something as typically Milanese strengthens the sense of specificity of her act of walking through and recognizing the city: it is not just any tour of Milan, it is a tale of a Milanese in the city. In other words, Francesca’s itinerary is a combination of narrative and vision through which a particularly positioned viewer/speaker privileges one of many possible landscapes. In the words of Guano, Francesca’s tour “valorized (…)

222
'certain relationships between people in particular places’ (…), thus striving to generate 'consensuses' on these places as well as the identity and entitlements of those who inhabited them” (Guano, 2003: 358, quoting Lefebvre, 1991).

Francesca also commented that non-Italian newcomers are often not in a position to appreciate the art and history that the city has to offer. While it is true that many immigrants - as well as many Italians! - work several jobs to make ends meet and thus might not have much time to go around the city nor money to pay tickets to enter expositions and museums, Francesca’s comments also reflect a commonly held assumption that immigrants do not really participate in city life, and echo what Maritano (2002) calls an “obsession with cultural difference”.

Immigrants are generally seen as essentially alien (Merrill, 2006; Murer 2003; Dines, 2002; Maritano, 2002; Krause, 2001), and many of the people I interviewed imagined them using different shops than “Italians”, living in different houses, pursuing different activities, and ignoring “things Italian” including art, fashion, and culture. A young Senegalese man told me in fact that one of the hardest things about living in Milan was exactly the ignorance of many people regarding immigrants and their countries of origin, as well as regarding cultures and religions different than their own.

Maria Anacleta’s pictures in front of churches and monuments, as well as my encounters and conversations with other non-Italian people, contradicted Francesca’s/local ideas that immigrants are not interested in art or “beauty” or not knowledgeable enough to “see” it. Maria Anacleta also told me she liked
Italian statues because they reminded her of learning history in school. Marta wanted to see the Scala theatre and took time off work to take me to visit Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" painting. Last but not least, I did not realize how I myself took for granted the hegemonic association of Milanese language, history, and identity until Mohamed Ba (see Chapter Seven) surprised me in recounting the history of Milan in impressive details, and in citing songs and phrases in Milanese dialect to interpret his own experience as an immigrant to the city.

**Embodied vision**

In his famous description of the lives of urban places and people, as they escape hegemonic order, de Certeau criticizes the power of the planner over the city as a disembodied view from above:

The desire to see the city preceded the means of satisfying it. Medieval or Renaissance painters represented the city as seen in a perspective that no eye had yet enjoyed. This fiction already made the medieval spectator into a celestial eye. It created gods. (...) The totalizing eye imagined by the painters of earlier times lives on in our achievements. The same scopic drive haunts users of architectural productions by materializing today the utopia that yesterday was only painted. (...) The panorama-city is a 'theoretical' (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices. (...) The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins. (...) They are walkers, (...) whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. (...) Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a
certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. (de Certeau, 1984: 92-93)

This passage of de Certeau, and the work of many other scholars, criticizes vision as a distancing act of power. Haraway, for example, calls it the “god-trick” (1991: 189) of seeing everything from nowhere, thus emphasizing that the disembodiment of the master subject can often be a way in which powerful subjects and interests make themselves invisible. In relation to the city, such a vision can correspond to an urban planning imposed from the municipality or from developers, and that the “practitioners of the city down below” cannot easily see/grasp or influence. Holston for example, in his 1989 ethnography of Brasilia, discusses how modernist plan for the capital of Brasil made perfect sense from above and in the ideals of a remote planners, but produced opposite outcomes once people had to live with and within it.

Although I find the analysis of scientific, hegemonic, modernist-architectural vision as distancing and disembodied very useful, I find de Certeau’s description a little disconcerting. For de Certeau defines the people who actually live in the city as blind – involved in activities that “elude legibility” and visuality, and which are more akin to speaking than seeing. The lack of vision is used here, as a metaphor, to talk about the resistance of people and of experiential daily life against hegemonic forms of control and governance. However, why do the walkers have to be necessarily blind? Why cannot they be engaged in all kinds of different visions and acts of seeing - some of them resistant, and some of them not? And perhaps all of them related in interesting
ways? Disembodied, distancing vision could be just one type of vision (Pinney, 2002) in city spaces\textsuperscript{35}, which perhaps could at times be used both by the planners in charge of “space” and the by the walkers who create “places”\textsuperscript{36}. The practices of looking/walking employed by Francesca and Maria Anacleti, as well as the complex politics of seeing, not seeing, being seen, and not being seen described by Zenobia, Naga, and Terre di Mezzo, require us first of all to think of multiplicities of gazes, and secondly, to start thinking of the relationships between vision and embodiments - not just disembodiment - in city space.

Embodied practices of vision are particularly relevant for considering the walks of Francesca and Maria Anacleti, in which seeing practices help delineate social categories and difference in urban spaces by the very way in which they place bodies in landscapes. The connection between embodiment and vision is particularly significant here also because these itineraries interweave discourses and practices related to fashion, aesthetics, gender, and ethnicity. Visibility plays a particular role in the way these forces, ideas, and structures come to life in Milanese public spaces. For one, far from innocent or distancing vision, Maria Anacleti’s and Francesca’s embodied gazes, appearing acts, and visual journeys through Milan reflect and challenge/reinscribe some of the contours of gender, race, and class that effect both city spaces and the specific ways in which my interlocutors relate to urban locales. For the other, they invite us to think that different ways of seeing the city by different positioned people intersect, reinforce or disrupt one another, thus taking part in complex visual cultures in which both differences and connections are manufactured and commented upon.
Gender roles and dilemmas in Filipino and Italian society, global and local inequalities, and an on-going racialization of care, shape the immigration of Filipino women, the issues they face, and the resources and imaginations they seek to harness. In turn, these affect how Filipino women might take part in urban landscapes and how they might be seen within them. Granata, Novak, and Polizzi (2003), for example, point out the particular mix of visibility and invisibility of Filipino women in Milan. Because many of them reside with their (middle and upper class) employer, they often use and live in the centre of the city, and they have no place of their own there. This makes them both invisible as legitimate residents and highly visible as migrant workers. To borrow Gordon’s words, here the intersections of gender, race and class determine “the shape (...) [of a particular] absence” in the urban terrain (Gordon, 1997: 6).

Discourses and practices centered on “beauty”, style, and aesthetics are another way in which particular gender identities are constructed in and through city spaces. Fashion as a consumption and leisure activity, as an embodied practice, and as a visual culture participates in mediating women’s access to public space (Del Negro, 2004). At the same time, these practices can strengthen the conceptual division between women’s role as “frivolous” and “foolish” consumers tempted by “the vanities of dress” (Entwistle, 2000: 54 and 22) in contrast to men’s skillful presence in urban spaces as public and political personae. The hegemonic association between gender, adornment and appearance which disadvantages women from full political citizenship in public space (Ruggerone, 2004) also obscures that shopping is an important part of
women's reproductive labor (Glennie and Thrift, 1996) as well as a source of sociability between women.

Embodied fashion in urban locales also constitutes gender in intimate and intricate links with class and race. For one, it is generally easier for white working class women to use fashion to pass as middle class than for women of colour. The latter are often assumed to be involved in low-paying jobs, irrespective of their dress, profession and class (see for example Breveglieri, Cologna, and Silva, 1999: 53 and 68) - unless their body shape can clearly identify them as models employed in the fashion industry. For the other, style and fashion erases and reinforces class hierarchies in very interesting ways. As one of my guides recounted (a white Italian-born working class young woman), almost anybody can dress well relatively cheaply and yet class is still of importance. While it is not possible to tell directly class from dress, those who can afford expensive clothing and accessories can choose to use them as status symbols. Most importantly, as Francesca suggests, the very combination of one's ways of dressing, where and when one promenades, and a practiced sense of entitlement to certain spaces reflect and are shaped by one's social position.

The shifting, daily interplays between social categories, and the ways these inform and are shaped by women' relations to urban spaces, inscribe both differences and connections between the itineraries I presented above. It is important to remember, for example, that the immigration of female domestic workers participates in the very constitution and negotiation of ideals of femininity and gender roles of middle and upper class women, which include being
successful workers/professionals, charming and affectionate companions, effective housekeepers, watchful mothers, and caring daughters. As Anderson (1999) argues, it is the work of migrant women that enables middle/upper class Italian women to juggle these unsustainable situations and contradictory identities. Italian women in fact “buy out” time through the employment of a domestic worker, for “maintaining themselves as ‘proper wives’ and proper mothers” (Anderson, 1999: 119) without confronting male family members about the division of labour in the house (see also Parrenas, 2001).

Another interesting connection between women like Maria Anacleta and Francesca is the way in which discourses and practices of aesthetic, tradition, Milanese-ness and urban renewal effect different women’s choices and chances concerning housing. As I mentioned in Chapter Five, as part of her tour, Francesca also guided me through the Isola neighbourhood which, as she described it, was currently being “cleaned up”. Francesca, who was planning to move to the neighbourhood, told me that while the restructuring meant that many of the old tenants – mostly immigrants - would be evicted, she was happy to know that they would find “a new house in one of the popular housing.” In spite of Francesca’s best intentions, however, this is doubtful: as I discussed earlier, housing is one of the main problems for people immigrating to Milan, with many immigrants living in cramped quarters, or even in abandoned buildings in the dismissed areas.

It is interesting here to note how for Francesca, a certain way of seeing and being in the city legitimizes her move to this neighbourhood and makes
“other’s” housing issues invisible and/or irrelevant. Francesca in fact expressed a feeling of entitlement to the area, which she described as one of the oldest and most ‘authentically Milanese’ neighbourhoods in the city, due to her love and appreciation of its historic and artistic heritage, on-going-ly cultivated through her walks. Here too, attending to daily, embodied practices of vision – the “web of looks” (Taylor, 1997: 19) through which identities are negotiated and contested - can help us recognize that different women’s locations and journeys through the city and its public spaces are not just parallel but interlinked and connected in important ways.

To say it differently, the juxtaposition of the two itineraries underlines that there are not just many different ways of seeing and being in the city but that these also interact in complex ways with local and contested imaginaries of who participates in the city and how. Maria Anacleta’s and Francesca’s circumstances and life stories shape the ways in which they see the city, walk and talk through it, and create links to urban locales. At the same time, it is important to remember that Maria Anacleta’s and Francesca’s ways of seeing and being in the city are not mutually exclusive, although they might be imagined to be so by many people living in Milan. Indeed the very assumption that they be so is an important part of the negotiation of claims to the city from the part of those who considers themselves Milanese. To say it simply, imagining that non-Italian residents in Milan use public space essentially differently than Milanese can be used to legitimate stereotypical perceptions of migrant women and men. It can be part of
the “struggle to exclude the migrants, who are [seen as] ‘taking over’ the buildings, the neighbourhood and the city” (Maritano, 2004: 69).

Here I would like to return to the concept of the struscio, as it is an interesting example of the links between vision, public space, and the negotiations of identities. The historian and novelist Castellaneta describes the traditional struscio in Milan as such: “in the habit of the promenade there was a double pleasure: the one of looking and the one of being looked at, of greeting and of being greeted. The street became a catwalk where one could show off a new dress or a tan” (Castellaneta, 1997: 99). Although the traditional struscio is not as popular as it used to be 40-50 years ago, this description still applies to many people’s promenading practices in the central streets and plazas of the city. In contemporary Milan, moreover, it is not only clothing and bodies, but also cars, cell phones, and accessories that are important parts of the show. According to one of my guides (a young working class woman), for example, “shoes are essential” for daily life in Milan. And another young, middle class woman recounts:

The [plastic or paper] bag [people carry with them] corresponds to their clothing, to the type of person. (…) Because there is a difference between bags. If you carry around a bag from the Prada [a very expensive fashion store], black with the small logo of Prada on it, is very different than if you carry around (…) a bag from Oviesse [a popular supermarket]. Even the bag has its role in the choreography of dressing. (March 12, 2005)
As both Guano (2007) and Del Negro (2004) indicate, especially for women the “struscio” has been an important way to participate in Italian urban public space. This, however, has often worked to strengthen traditional ideas of femininity, as women are usually expected to conform to hegemonic canons of beauty, heterosexual attractiveness and femininity. These are well described in the following quote by Castellaneta:

Our [Milanese] women have (...) a completely feminine ambition to be admired, for their figure, for their dress, and for their comportment. (...) And this can not only be noticed in the streets of the centre, where one promenades as if [on display] in a storewindow, but also in the subway where it is rare to meet a girl without makeup or a woman clerk dressed carelessly. And so many times I noticed housewives shopping in a supermarket dressed in a [very expensive] furcoat! (Castellaneta, 1997: 35)

While the struscio is usually linked to particular places and times, such as the central streets or plazas of the city, the weekend and the evenings, Castellaneta’s words also shows that it is deeply connected to wider aesthetic practices in daily life. Needless to say, women at times follow the above ideals, at time play with them, and at times actively resist them. As Francesca reminds us, these practices can not only be seen as a burden for women, but also as a vehicle of sociality, cultural creativity, and subtle empowerment (see also Guano 2007).

To make matters more complicated, the struscio can at times become an arena of commentary and negotiation on multiculturalism in contemporary Milan. Many fashion-abiding “Milanese” women I talked to insisted that they do not engage in the struscio because “they are too busy”, because it is too “provincial” a practice, and because Milan has always been “an introverted city”. Similarly,
other "Milanese" women I talked to said that they never go to the centre, even if they actually do. Several of them explained that they do not go there and they do not engage in *struscio* because, especially in the weekends, the centre is full of *zarri* (people from the hinterland who can be recognized as such because of their way of dressing) and *extracomunitari* (migrants arriving from outside the European Union). Rather than indicating that the *struscio* has disappeared, those comments might point out that, for some women, the *struscio* might no longer be a "Milanese" thing to do - or, conversely, that not engaging in it might be a "Milanese" thing to do. In other words, comments such as the ones above may express an imaginary that only Milanese people are truly interested in beauty and fashion yet cosmopolitan enough to not participate in the *struscio*. This serves to uphold a conceptual and material division between more and less legitimate residents in the city (see also Dines, 2002).

The *struscio* is a particularly apt venue for discourses on multiculturalism and identities because it is a relational, reflexive, and performative practice of seeing. It is a form of looking which requires another gaze, and which links social actors to the seeing body of others (see Pinney, 2002). Because the *struscio* links people with a particular context and crowd, it becomes very important with whom and where it happens. It is interesting in this context to note that Castellaneta (1997) traces the beginning of the relative decline of the *struscio* in Milan to the entrance of lower class people to the centre of Milan, originally the space of the elite and the upper classes.
The *struscio* highlights how complex practices of being, walking, and seeing are a part of the daily constitution of social categories in/through public space and help talk about and reinscribe differences between Milanese residents. Moreover, just like stories about who participates in the *struscio* and who does not, the itineraries of Maria Anacleta and Francesca suggest that tales of immigration and of aesthetics are both integral parts of who can participate and how in public space. This is because these discourses shape the public spaces in which the two women could meet and interact, and the ways in which their itineraries could cross. Paradoxically, in fact, Maria Anacleta and Francesca are not likely to meet in the centre even if they use very similar streets and plazas. Indeed, the discrimination and avoidance practiced by many Italian residents in Milan contradicts the ideal of public space as a place where “one always risks encountering those who are different” (Calderia, 2000: 301) - that is, a “public space founded on uncertainty and openness” (ibid.: 303), and on “difference without exclusion” (Young, 1990, quoted in Caldeira, 2000: 301)\textsuperscript{40}.

While this seems like a pessimistic note to end with, we should also not underestimate the very possibilities of alternative imaginings, visions, and spatial strategies women engage in through their daily lives. The very differences between Maria Anacleta’s and Francesca’s pictures can be an interesting example in this respect. Francesca’s absence from the photographs can be seen as a sign of power: it underlines that she occupies the legitimate viewing position. Yet, this absence could also be interpreted as denoting a sense of loss of her position in the midst of changes to the city. Conversely, while Maria Anacleta’s
pictures place her somewhere between a visitor and a Milanese, her strong visual presence in the city also reflects the ways in which immigrant women are shaping, claiming, and constructing urban spaces and are demanding justice and recognition.
CHAPTER SEVEN: PLACES AND STAGES: NARRATING AND PERFORMING THE CITY

“Theatre is an itinerary in hope” (Mohamed Ba, March 26, 2005)

This chapter follows Mohamed Ba, a community educator and theatre writer, as he guides me through the centre of Milan. I was introduced to Mohamed Ba by Carlo Giorgi, the director of the street newspaper Terre di Mezzo, who I had interviewed some time earlier. Mohamed and I met on a bitter cold Saturday morning (on March 26, 2005) in the Duomo Plaza: like in the case of Francesca and of Maria Anacletta, I had asked him to show me “his” city, and the following itinerary, journey, and images are the results of this walk we did together.

When Mohamed arrived in Italy several years ago from Senegal, he worked with Terre di Mezzo, both as a vendor and as a liaison person between the vendors and the editorial board. His tour and perspective on the city centre reflects this experience. For one, he describes how a recent immigrant who works as a street seller might navigate his way through Milan’s centre. For the other, Mohamed talks about the streets themselves as an avenue for knowledge, sociability, and ultimately hope, as the vendors and passersby (typically immigrants and Italians) use the potential of public space to meet and learn about each other.

According to Cologna, Breveglieri, Granata, and Novak (1999) selling in city streets, plazas, and markets has been one of the most important occupations
for Senegalese migrants, who have been arriving to Italy in significant numbers starting from the beginning of the 1980s. As Mohamed also describes below, the co-nationals who help a newcomer settling in, often offer him (the migrants are mostly young men; see Cologna et al., 1999) a collection of wares to sell as a first step to establish his business. In addition to vending, Senegalese residents of Milan and its metropolitan area are increasingly being employed by small and medium industrial businesses in the region (Cologna et al., 1999: 44). Cologna explains that, throughout the nineties, the work opportunities in this field have in fact made Lombardy into an important area of settlement for many people from Senegal who had initially moved to other regions of Italy. A young Senegalese man I met in Milan, for example, described how he alternated working in a factory with some of his cousins and selling books in the streets when work at his other place of occupation is low.

While talking about the difficult process of settling and working in Milan, Mohamed's itinerary through the centre that I present in this chapter encompasses much more than a description of a newcomer's experience of the city. By adopting at the same time the perspectives of a long time Milanese resident and a new immigrant in precarious conditions, my guide problematizes easy categories of "insiders" and "outsiders" to the city. Nor are these two positions the only ones which inform his tale. During the tour, Mohamed becomes also a time traveler in the past and the future; an elder and a young man; a scriptwriter, narrator and performer/actor; a teacher and a questioning student. One of the aspects of Mohamed's itinerary that interests me most,
moreover, is its starkly theatrical character. Mohamed crafted a wonderfully elaborate and art-full monologue which included proverbs, poetic verses, choruses, and even a song, and which moved effortlessly from one plaza and/or street to another. During the tour, I felt like a spectator following a representation of the city through changing and interlinked scenes. Similarly to Freeman's description of Buenos Aires (2001), the city itself emerged as a "mise-en-scene", and its very locations as stages for (a) performance(s).

In this chapter, I argue that the performative sense of his tour is particularly important in constructing alternative notions of "belonging" to Milan, and in modeling public space as a creative site for social transformation. Following Dolan's (2005) argument that theatre can help us experience utopian moments in the present, I look at how Mohamed's play enacts the ideal of public space, and, in doing so, makes room for differently positioned Milanese to claim spaces in the city. Critical acts of imagination and vision enabled by performance are crucial tools in his project. By engaging the streets and plazas of Milan as stages, Mohamed's itinerary interweaves urban landscapes, real and imagined life stories, and a multitude of speaking/viewing/walking positions. Because his narration and itinerary constructs such a complex position for a cultural commentator, it challenges assumptions that there is only one category of Milanese - or of Senegalese, or of migrant - and that only people who were born in a city can truly know and understand it.

In attending to Mohamed's tour as a theatrical act, I find Bauman's and Briggs' (1990) discussion of performance particularly useful. They point out that
performances have to be seen as deeply tied to contexts, such as discourses, situations, relationships, and/or other performances, which follow or precede them. At the same time, however, performances are also particularly apt at transcending those very contexts and thus creating “memorable text[s]” (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 73), which “can be lifted out of [their] (...) interactional setting[s]” (ibid.) and can then again play a role in other situations. Indeed, the performative form of Mohamed’s tour ensures that his audience/I experiences and remembers it as a “memorable” and authoritative text on the city and its history. It is not simply a walk through the city, but it is a moment of teaching - a commentary which aims at reframing landscapes and experiences so as to foster understanding. According to Mohamed’s words below, the chance to do just that, to talk about the city and act as a guide, is a powerful way to show that he belongs to the city and that the city also belongs to him. To say it differently, “[p]erformance puts the act of speaking on display” (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 73). As such, it emphasizes that, in the context of Milan’s emergent multiculturalism, the very act of talking about the city by a speaker positioned from between and within cultures and places (see Tsing, 1993) is a significant political and pedagogical praxis.

Because the performative form of Mohamed’s itinerary seemed to me to be so important, I chose to represent it as a theatre play (I found Madison’s 1999 text very inspiring in this regard). In order to do so, I presented long passages from Mohamed’s narration, and linked the excerpts to the urban “stages” Mohamed used. I quoted Mohamed at length so as to show the movement
between different speaking positions. Most importantly, however, I am interested in creating a space for Mohamed’s intervention as a critical, counter commentary on Milanese public space, an important “back talk” in relation to contemporary discourses on immigration and multiculturalism in the city. Following Stewart, I am attempting to use “the possibilities of narrative itself to fashion a gap in the order of things” (Stewart, 1996: 3).

I represented the setting both through pictures (frames from the video recoding of the tour) and words (the stage directions) because the location in and journey through actual city spaces was an important referent for Mohamed’s tale. It is important here to note that the images and the written descriptions do not always match. While the pictures make visible to the reader the places (albeit not all of them) where Mohamed told me about ‘his’ Milan, my descriptions adapt those settings to a possible theatre stage. They also introduce the following elements which were not part of our walk: the choruses (in most scenes), two men with masks (in scene III), five characters in the shadow (ibid.), and the typewriter, chair, table, canvas, and board (in scene I to III), with its associated actions of creating and sharing texts and maps.

The discrepancies between the pictures and the stage directions thus reflect the particular status of this text, which is neither (or both) a verbatim transcription nor (and) a fictional writing. All of the lines of Mohamed (and my few brief comments within it) are translated quotes from the transcript. The itinerary presented in the play largely corresponds to the route we took through the city (I indicate in the text when the two differ from each other). The street seller, the
woman with an accordion, the passersby with shopping bags, and the sound of 
the church bells were all present in our tour through Milan. However, I added 
fictional moments and used a theatre script genre because I believe that this 
form evokes, better than a regular academic discussion, the movements through 
the city, the sights and sounds, and the creation of affect that are so central in 
Mohamed’s commentary. As Thrift (2003) points out, these are aspects that are 
lost in usual scholarly discussions, although they are constituent parts of all or 
interaction with the world and with others.

In the text below, I also inscribed myself as a participant in the play. This 
reflects my double role, as both a listening/following spectator to which the tour is 
directed, and as a particularly positioned commentator who writes the itinerary 
into a text, thus interpreting and representing it for other audiences. My first goal 
in becoming a character in the writing below, is then to point out how Mohamed’s 
intervention created a significant space for an audience. Mohamed’s very 
description of theatre in Senegal underlines that the spectator is always an active 
and fundamental part of the play:

the theatre is not that spectacle where there are on one side actors and on 
the other side the public. No, because (...) the public who listens or 
follows the story becomes automatically the protagonist of the story it 
listens to.

Although I say very little throughout Mohamed’s narration, and could hardly be 
called a protagonist, I still had a specific task to carry on: to witness the story and 
being transformed by it. In this sense, performing can put not only “the act of
speaking on display” (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 73) but also the one of listening. As Dolan suggests, theatre can intensify the act of listening to another person, with the aim of “modell[ling] a hopeful method for living near others with respect and affection” (Dolan, 2005: 88). It is important here to note that this itinerary is a version of a walking tour that Mohamed prepared and performed for a group of Terre di Mezzo readers a couple of years before. It was part of a small series of guided tours, which aimed to show Milan from a range of different perspectives to interested city residents (mostly Italians). As such, this project was meant to be transformative while directly involving its listeners as the protagonist of this change.

Indeed, during the tour, I was changed. Surprised that Mohamed knew so much about the history of Milan, and that he knew expressions in Milanese dialect that I had only heard from older, Milanese-born residents, I had to confront my own stereotypes about who knows what about the city. But that was not all. The stories Mohammed told me, and their rhythm, sounds, sights, and sense of directions and movements moved me, affectively, to imagine what public space could be like. As Dolan argues, performance can be a unique tool for social critique and transformation, in that it allows audiences to experience “what utopia could feel like” (Dyer, 1992, quoted in Dolan, 2005: 39). What I learned from Mohamed, in turn, also allowed me to look differently at other moments of urban life, such as the events I describe in the second part of this chapter. This is the second way in which I act as a ‘participant’ audience. As Bauman and Briggs write, “[e]ven when audience members say or do practically
nothing at the time of the performance, their role becomes active when they serve as speakers in subsequent entextualizations of the topic at hand” (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 69).

Writing myself as a character in the play is then also a way for me to remind the reader of my own activities of “entextualization” (presenting Mohamed’s walk as a detachable text) and especially of “recontextualization” (using this text as a new frame of reference for another series of events/performances). In the second part of this chapter, I use Mohamed’s text as a frame of reference for looking at a series of rallies which happened in the centre of Milan. Although a guided tour of the city seems at first sight to be not comparable to “city wars”, as the rallies were dubbed in the press, Mohamed’s carefully crafted tale of fluid identities remind us that memory, vision, and performance have powerful implications when they come to life in the streets. Not only does his narration remind us that practices of seeing, representing and spectatorship are important loci for the creation of political and social identities. By imaginatively placing sociality, cultural creativity, and hope as part of public space, Mohamed’s commentary can also become one of those memories we can “seize hold (...) as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (Benjamin, 1969: 257).
A tour of the city

Scene I. The Duomo cathedral

The Duomo is on the background. It is mostly covered by a white cloth. People and pigeons are walking on the square. Mohamed Ba/the tour guide and Cristina/the anthropologist are standing in front of the Duomo. To the side of the plaza are a chair, and a table with a typewriter on it. Behind it hangs a white canvas. The typewriter, chair, table, and canvas remain there until the end of Scene III.

Mohamed/the tour guide (standing facing the Duomo, and occasionally pointing to it):

The immigrants today see the Duomo as being so majestic ... But in reality it is nothing other than (...) the realization of a very long and tiresome itinerary which has involved the city of Milan for centuries and centuries. (...) So anyone who arrives often looks for the centre of the city in order to orient him/herself, because often, by searching for the centre of the city, s/he will be able to move: s/he enters and exits. And the one who follows well the history of Milan will understand that it [the city] has a belt: the Navigli canals. So the immigrant[43] [from Sub-Saharan Africa] who arrives in Italy is often welcomed by his/her conationals (...) [S/he] already has a point of reference, a point of approach, that will be The House. And when s/he comes to that House
s/he will often be struck by its aspect, because one always expects to see houses perhaps very beautiful, with a room for each member, and so on, and one finds oneself in a one-room apartment with fifteen-twenty people, forced to sleeping in turns.

That impact with the reality is often embarrassing, but one does not have the right to look back. So already who leaves leaves and the adventure starts from there. But

*(voices from back stage join Mohamed's voice, creating a chorus)*

the adventure passes also through knowledge: until we know, we won't be able to respect or (...) to appreciate, *(end chorus)*

because usually one recognizes oneself in the positive values of all cultures.

So our poor immigrant friend from Senegal or from [another] part of Africa, finds her/himself in Italy, s/he finds her/his friends who the next day go and buy a roll of film, and where do they bring her/him?

Here, in the centre of Milan. S/he sees this majestic [Duomo] - that seems from far away a porcupine -

Cristina/the anthropologist *(laughs)*

Mohamed/the tour guide: it is a symbol of a city.

So, the pigeons that fly for us* have become banal, familiar. But for who arrives: s/he has her/his mouth watering, why?

Because they are eaten in our side [of the world] and s/he already imagines a barbeque with many pigeons, and so on.

Cristina/the anthropologist *(laughs)*

Mohamed/the tour guide: and s/he is told: no, no, no, one does not touch them, one does not eat them. So resignation sets in. So s/he tries to pose her/himself questions:

But this city was always like this?
How come it became like this?

This plaza, what does it represent to the citizens?

But unfortunately his conationals are not able to explain. The explanation that s/he is told is that here is the meeting point: when the Milan [soccer team] wins the tournament one meets here, at New Year’s Eve one meets here, perhaps even in the past one assembled here. So another itinerary begins, through the belt of Milan that is the belt of the Navigli [canals].

The majority of countries of Sub-Saharan Africa suffer from drought; it is a zone where it rarely rains. [In Senegal] colonization introduced an industrial monoculture of peanuts. (...) The earth has suffered. At the end there is an advancing of the desert (...) and the farmers have been forced to go to the urban centers. (...) And then [to] Europe, following a dream, legitimate even, to have a better life, to have the flexibility to get up in the morning and to start to dream.

But a Europe particularly rooted in our habits and customs because through colonization we acquired a double cultural identity (...)

And so one closes one’s eyes and leaves. One throws oneself, one throws oneself in this city: big, majestic. And when one finds oneself here to snap 78 photographs that one sends home the next day, with pigeons, this gives a bit of serenity to the family that was anxious for her/his departure. (...)

But this is only the first step. Slowly s/he follows the course of the water and s/he asks her/himself: but water [here] is so sterile, nothing moves, it seems almost in winter sleep. Why? Why? Because fortunately water is not something lacking on this side [of the world], but on the other side, where water is alive, everyone ... animals, carovaneers, everyone meets around the water (...)

Following the course of the water, s/he realizes that it becomes a belt, a belt that suddenly ends behind here, (...) and s/he tells her/himself, but how come s/he ended in a street which on the other side is called Via Laghetto [Little Lake Street].

So s/he poses her/himself the question: (...)Via Laghetto? It is strange, because here there isn’t any water.

But yes, there was water: water underneath.
But what was that water used for?
So s/he continues her/his tour and looks and cannot see another way then the Duomo\(^{47}\). (\(\ldots\))
The Duomo is a factory which never ends. If one in Milan is taking a really long time to do something, often one tells him: you are slow like the works of the Duomo. Because from the remote times, when the work began, the constructions are never ending. (\(\ldots\))

Cristina/the anthropologist
(walks away from the Duomo square, as the lights go out from the Duomo square. She sits in front of the typewriter, and starts writing this text. The text is projected onto the white canvas hanging behind her.)

Landscapes, journeys, and voices

Landscapes

Mohamed’s descriptions and reflections remind me that we can think of landscapes as the interweaving of the visible and the invisible, the “given-to-be-seen” (Taylor, 1997: 122) and the hidden, the details that are present and what is absent. In his words, and in the journeys of an unknown (or perhaps even too well known) friend, the web of the Navigli canals shine through the city floor behind the cathedral, while the Sforza Castle (see below) becomes opaque, forever closed, and incomprehensible. Listening to him while looking at the Duomo, I notice that the cover, more than concealing the face of the cathedral, makes starkly visible its history and reputation as a never ending factory and construction zone. Animals come to the foreground, from the pigeons imagined on a barbeque (a theme developed also by Calvino’s fiction\(^{48}\) to the half-wooled pig which Mohamed talks about below.

What comes to be on which side of the divide between visible and invisible, present and absent, depends in important ways on the position of the
person watching, moving, and being within a landscape. Mohamed points out that the perspective of a viewer is itself never simple. On the one hand, it encompasses multiple, sometimes even contradictory visions (see for example Rose, 1993). It includes not only what we see, but also what we are supposed to see. It includes “the shape” of the “absence” (Gordon, 1997: 6) of what could be there, and as such lives in the space of dreams, wishes, or hauntings. The “house perhaps very beautiful”, the pictures of the Duomo, the pigeons, the water: they all lend themselves to being seen at least twice, from different perspectives. They look different for different social actors, because they occupy different places in people’s experiences, expectations, and daily lives. Mohamed suggests that it is by ‘looking twice’ and adopting different points of view that we can, for a moment, be different subjects within the landscape.

On the other hand, it is by moving through the city and following its routes that a particular vision becomes possible. For the recent immigrant, the waterscape of the Navigli, now mostly covered by asphalt, emerges through a journey of discovery of the new city s/he finds her/himself in. In this manner, a way of looking connects several itineraries and stories. The walk through the city started, in a sense, from his/her departure from Senegal, and is thus deeply connected to colonization, to the history of Sub-Saharan Africa and its waterways. In turn, the way in which “our friend” walks through the city and what s/he sees uncovers other journeys and perspectives of city spaces. It is perhaps in this sense that the Duomo and its square are “the realization of a very long and tiresome itinerary” by a multitude of people “which has involved the city of Milan for centuries and centuries”.

(End of scene I. Lights off.)
Mohamed/the tour guide and Cristina/the anthropologist are back in the Duomo plaza. This time, the Duomo is in the corner of the stage, and next to it there is a crowded street, leading to a low brick and stone building with arches. On the other side of the stage, there is still the typewriter, chair, table, and canvas.

Mohamed/the tour guide (still standing in the Duomo square, but facing away from the cathedral): But the name of the city, where was it born [where does it come from]? So there are many myths and many legends, one of which narrates that there was a tribal chief called Bellovoso, who passed the Alps and came to Milan, and so everyone asked him what the name of the city was. Not knowing what to answer he asked his councilors (…)

(starting to walk away from the square, through a crowded street; Cristina/the anthropologist follows him. People on the street are walking in the opposite direction to them.)

So his councillors went on a retreat for some days – the legend narrates that these days were five. And that is why the number five became important for the city of Milan, because [for example] to liberate this city

Cristina/the anthropologist: Yes!
Mohamed/the tour guide: the battle lasted five days, so that's why [there is a] Plaza Five Days, but that is a recent story. So he was told that (...) the city had a name and a symbol, and that (...) the name of the city figured in the symbol, that was a little animal. (...) So they went around in the city to look for that animal, and it was hard to find, because you can imagine how the city was then, with all these streets always full of people (...) (indicating the street they are walking on with ample gestures) And the legend narrates that they took this street that is called Via Dante which is by Piazza Mercanti, (...), so they came under this palace. And there, where there are the stairs, they found a particular animal (...) it was (...) the female of the pig, but it was particular because it had half [of its body covered by] wool – from Latin *media lanuta*, which later became *Mediolanum* and Milano of our days. And in fact the symbol of that small animal, the pig, can be found right here (stopping under the brick and stone building, and pointing up to one of the arches, where there is a small carved animal figure)

Cristina/the anthropologist: Ah, that one!

Mohamed/the tour guide: (...) This is why the history of such a big city as Milan becomes difficult to understand, because one usually expects to see a symbol (...) which would be visible to all. But the pig is here, stuck in this way. So the people ask: but if I have to look for the symbol of Milan, where do I go to look for it? So the symbol was chosen that would be visible to all (...) that is the one of the *Madonnina* (pointing to the Duomo in the distance, and starting to sing the song “o mia bela madunina”).

Cristina/the anthropologist (returns to her typewriter while Mohamed/the tour guide continues singing “o mia bela madunina”. When the song ends, the lights go out on the crowded street and the building with arches, and Cristina/the
anthropologist starts again writing her text, which is projected on the white canvas).

Journeys

Just like the water of the Navigli, Mohamed’s words create a belt, an intricate net of itineraries through Milan. These are some of the paths which emerge from his descriptions:

(Cristina/the anthropologist gets up and starts unrolling the following maps, which she pins to a board behind her. The maps are made of transparent paper and as she pins them one over the other the drawn-in itineraries of each map overlap and add to each other).

Figure 45

Map of Bellovoso’s journey
Figure 46
Map of a street seller's journey

Figure 47
Map of the Navigli canals
These itineraries are not only physical journeys through city streets and plazas, they span continents, languages, and times. Suddenly it is not so straightforward to tell the history (official or otherwise) and stories of Milan – and we might start to suspect that it never was. To understand it, to tell it, it is necessary to talk about colonization in Africa, as well as about the fascination for Leonardo by European tourists, the legend of Bellovoso, and more. In a way, Mohamed’s narration makes space for ‘ghosts’: people, events, and places that are not visible, yet still have effects in present daily life (Gordon, 1997). His comment on the history of Milan being so difficult to understand because it is hidden, “stuck in this way”, can be read as an illuminating description of the problem of historical memories stuck between the thick arches of power.

Milan is indeed a city of ghosts, unsolved puzzles, and contradictory memories. Just a few minutes walk away from where we stand, is Piazza Fontana, where a bomb killed 16 people in 1969. Still nobody knows who planted...
the bomb near a busy bank. It is generally believed that it was far-right forces, in a “strategy of tension” aimed at keeping the left from power. But who exactly was involved? Until now the courts have been trying to follow an elusive, never to find truth. And how did Pinelli die, the anarchist who was being questioned by police about the bombing? Did he really just trip and accidentally fall from a window while in police custody?50

One of the interesting things about itineraries, is that, if a walking tour through the city can evoke stories, events, and relationships, the opposite is also true: words, tales, and performances conjure up streets and places, and make it possible for us to see, know, and ultimately move through the city. In Mohamed’s text, questions - such as: “this city was always like this?” “This plaza, what does it represent to the citizens?” Why Via Laghetto? Why is the city called Milano? “Where do I look for [the symbol of the city]?” - are the centerpieces of the narration. These questions, however, are also always tentative directions, steps in an itinerary, literally the beginning of streets. Just like the course of the Naviglio tells a story, the story of migration of a person traces a journey in city spaces.

(End of scene II. Lights out.)

Scene III. Piazza Mercanti/Palazzo della Ragione
Mohamed/the tour guide and Cristina/the anthropologist are standing in a quite, old courtyard, with what looks like a brick and stone well in the middle. Leaning on one side of the well, there are two young men wearing one black, one white masks, and playing several musical instruments. On the side of the courtyard, there is still the typewriter, chair, table, and canvas.

Mohamed/the tour guide: here was also the place where (...) people came to be judged. In those times bankruptcy was a shame, not only for the artisan but also for his whole family (...) So we find some analogies with the African tradition where honor needs to be defended at all costs (...) If one failed his duty he was not put in prison but brought in a plaza and the elders hit him with words where even the most powerful war tank could not touch him: in his honor, in his dignity. (...) But also in Milan when one failed, he was brought to this plaza. The one who arrives here thinks to have found a well, but in reality it is not a well, because inside there is no water, inside there is a stone (...) 

Cristina/the anthropologist: (surprised) A stone?

Mohamed/the tour guide: inside there is a stone called the stone of the beaten. Why? Like in the African tradition, the one who went bankrupt was brought here, naked, and had to hit his bottom on the stone three times to be shamed in public. And so, you see,

(voices from back stage join Mohamed's voice, creating a chorus) even if the world seems so old, the beginning of the future emerges always from the past (end chorus)

(...) One is very sorry if s/he lives in a city and cannot be the flag carrier of this city when s/he leaves. Because my milanese-ness did not detract anything from my African-ness, it has confirmed it, even. (...)So we are convinced that the world goes how it does because we have forgotten the weight of culture, (...)

255
(voices from back stage join Mohamed’s voice, creating a chorus) culture is the only thing that is left to a person, even if everything is taken away from him (…). (end chorus).

But my grandfather told me “when you will happen to go to another country, with other people, if you see that everyone runs after the having, let them go and run after the knowing because sooner or later it will be you who will have to manage what they will have found”. And doing the touristic guide today in Milan for me is a payment; my richness and my treasure are to know this city, to appreciate it, in its symbolic and its imaginary places.

Because it is a city that was always been contested – in the Middle Ages as well as after; but also in our days, because the foreign communities divide among themselves the Duomo Plaza. There is a corner where only Peruvians meet, on the other side only Africans - when the good weather arrives they go to play drums, bongos, and so on - on the other side Latin-Americans, and so on. And the Italians find themselves there, easily consumed [literally: eaten] by the artistic and cultural expression of those who arrive. Because when I arrive with my djembe, with my drum that I start to play, often the young Italian guy who looks at me gets excited and wants to do what I do. And with desire and passion he will even succeed, but he will forget that he himself has the tarantella, the pizzica, the Tammurriata Nera.

So in that context immigration becomes a problem, not a phenomenon, because it will confirm the uprooting of the Italian people from the foundations of its culture, its history, and it is a problem to face. But if the Italian who comes to see me is conscious of having la tarantella and the Tammurriata Nera, it will be enough to bring it around the table and together we can do interculture. But we can’t think about integration by asking one to do exactly what the other does in order to count [that is, to matter in society], otherwise (…) that becomes assimilation.

Cristina/the anthropologist
(returns to her typewriter to the side of the setting, as the lights go out on the courtyard. She continues writing her text, while the music continues)

Voices

What particularly strikes me in Mohamed's play is his use of different voices or perspectives within one tale. I can imagine all of these characters here around me, as I try to distinguish them and to make their acquaintance.

(Cristina/the anthropologist gets up, takes a piece of paper with the text of Mohamed/the guide's narration, and cuts it with a scissor in five sections. In the meantime, five figures appear standing in the shadows, on the side of the typewriter. She gives one piece of paper to each section to each of them, as she greets them, one by one).

Cristina/the anthropologist: (addressing the first figure) You are the narrator? (addressing the next figure) The voice of history? (addressing the next figure) Our friend! (addressing the next figure) Grandfather? (addressing the next figure, but the audience cannot hear what she says) ... (then she returns to the typewriter, and continues to write her text. The five personages disappear in the darkness)

Steedly points out how the author of a story always writes him/herself in it as a "figure in the carpet" (Steedly, 1993: 20). I find this image helpful while I re-listen and re-write Mohamed's tale. Although Mohamed's telling seems at first sight a linear description and a monologue, part of his performative aspect comes from the fact that it includes several characters which are placed in a dialogue with each other. Sometimes this dialogue erupts in the open, creating small vignettes,
but often the interaction of these voices is similar to the subtle weaving together of several strands and colours. For this reason, to continue with the analogy, it is often difficult to distinguish exactly one thread and/or pattern from the other. It seems to me that this entanglement is one of the strength of this performative commentary. By being many and interlinked figures in the carpet of the narration, Mohamed then addresses the ways in which this different positioned social actors co-inhabit a city like Milan, and how their being together in public spaces creates both tensions and possibilities.

One of the most powerful “doings” of a tale is often the creation of personages which are too slippery for dominant tropes and discourses to anchor themselves on them (Tsing, 1993). Although Mohamed talks about Senegalese and Italians, he carefully presents them as much more complex categories than the ones often imagined in the media and daily discourses. A Senegalese can be a wise grandfather, can be a recent immigrant, can be a person with “a double cultural identity”. Similarly, an Italian can be a racist, can be the youth who “forgets” her/his italian-ness, can be somebody who changes and learns by engaging in dialogue. Both can be a milanese: somebody who lives in the city, regardless of his nationality and/or colour. Indeed, I find that the strength of his story comes not so much from the fact that it includes many points of view, but in the way in which they shift, mingle, and become one another.

By talking about identity as several dresses, speaking positions, and intersecting itineraries, he points out that “milanese-ness” does not preclude “African-ness” and vice versa. This also becomes a comment on the very character of urban spaces. The use of Piazza del Duomo by members of different communities is consistent with its history as a meeting place, with the geographical and historical position of Milan as a middle space between trading routes. And again, for “the one who follows well the history of Milan”, its thick layer of histories becomes a resource, a “richness” and a “treasure” and a way to become a “flag carrier of a city”.

(End of scene III. Lights out).
Scene IV. The Sforza Castle

Mohamed/the tour guide and Cristina/the anthropologist are walking on another crowded street. The street is lined with shops. Many of the people walking by carry plastic shopping bags. On one side of the street a black man wearing a heavy jacket and a woolen hat is trying to sell books to passersby. At the end of the street, in the distance, there is the Sforza Castle. The side where the typewriter was placed in the previous scenes is now in the darkness.

Mohamed/the tour guide: (...) Our immigrant friend will (...) need a minimum of 8-9 months for her/him to be able to move around alone. S/he will ask passersby, (...) s/he will get explanations, but not for everything, why? First, time is short, and the second reason is that the one who leaves one's country can have on his/her shoulders more than forty mouths to feed. Thus the time for discovery cannot be too long, and everything s/he will know will be reduced to the necessary minimum (...)

So our friend (...) will be entrusted to somebody else who will act as his/her tutor, from the same household where s/he resides. And this person will have the task to help him grow in her/his work. Everyone who arrives does not speak the language, perhaps does not even have documents and so forth, the only thing that s/he can do is to sell. Sell what? (...) The first day [in the house] s/he will have to meet everyone, explain how relatives are, and so forth, and then there is a collection. Every member of the household gives him something, perhaps a
packet of CDs, (...) some t-shirts to sell, (...) The next day s/he will be assigned
to a tutor who will bring him/her along when s/he goes out selling. Perhaps s/he
will put him/her hundred meters from the fixed location where s/he stays, perhaps
in a parking lot, or in front of the stadium, or here in the centre. So for a month,
for a month s/he will not have to pay anything. (...) This will give him/her the time
to sell and to put away money, and construct his/her capital. From the second
month s/he will have the responsibility to do exactly what the other people in the
house do and s/he will become a complete member of the household in every
respect.
So from the Duomo looking at this road, Via Dante, that brings us directly to the
Castle, (...) [our immigrant friend] passes by the Piccolo Theatre, but s/he does
not even look at it, because (...) the theatre how it is understood in Africa has
nothing to do with the Piccolo Theatre, or La Scala, no, let’s forget about it.
Because for us the theatre has to give us again the joy of living, the theatre has
to be a moment of freedom, of artistic expression, the theatre is not that
spectacle where there are on one side actors and on the other side the public.
No, because the public also has to interact, the public who listens or follows the
story becomes automatically the protagonist of the story it listens to. (...) And so I remember well the first theatrical performance I did in Italy, with a very
good producer of the Teatro Officina, (...) so he asked me for the script.
And I said: which script?
But, the script of the performance!
But no, there is no need to write it, it is my performance.
Yes, I know it is yours, but I need to know how it will be.
If you want I can narrate it to you.
No, no, you do not need to tell it, you need to write it.
(...)
So I was not ready to do interculture because I had not understood his reality.
(...) So from there I understood that leaving my country I would have had to
borrow a new dress and that it should not at all be tight for me. I just had to
realize that I was borrowing it. And this to make better my permanence in Italy.
Because we will never be able to communicate if we are speaking different languages (…)

(A woman playing music on an accordion appears on stage/on the street. She plays a slow, and repetitive music while Mohamed/the tour guide continues to talk. While playing she crosses the stage until she exits on the other side).

This is helpful for me in order to – why not? – learn the positive aspects on this side and perhaps bring them to the other side that I left and see them also grow with a new dress, that they will not have borrowed, it will be always theirs, but it will change a bit their point of view.

(voices from back stage join Mohamed's voice, creating a chorus)

Because only the one who sleeps, who passes his life sleeping, will not evolve (end chorus)

and there is never an exclusive culture in the world.

Every culture is daughter of sub- and micro cultures,
every culture is a witness to a lived time,
is an experience,
every culture is a page of an encounter,
of a journey,
of a line of a poem,
of a relation.

Every culture is a witness to a lived time,
but not of the time to live,
because we cannot anticipate the culture that will come.
We know nothing about that, because certainly the milanese culture of 3000 will have nothing to do with this. It is clear that it will draw some positive aspects that we would have left them but they will not have to move necessarily how we move [today]. (…)

(Music ends as the woman with the accordion exits the stage).
[Our immigrant friend] (...) will meet many people and offer her/his articles [moving between two train stations and the city centre]. (...) There are some times in which s/he really succeeds in selling and making money, but there are also worse moments in which s/he cannot even sell one product. (...) S/he will try in any case and in every way not only to sell her/his articles but s/he will also try to educate her/himself through her/his job, because there is not the necessary and sufficient time to go to school and learn the language. And so her/his school becomes the street. And if her/his school is the street, the people s/he meets in the road become, so to speak, her/his teachers. For this reason it is not uncommon to see one insisting to sell a CD. S/he does not care (...) if the person in front of him/her likes music or not. (...) The important thing is that there is that dialogue which enables him/her to understand the tenses, the accents, since Italian grammar is something that scares everyone (...) So s/he takes this direction and follows the crowd and finds him/herself in front of the Castle.

Lights go out, and when they come back on, only the right side of the stage is in the spotlight. Instead of the typewriter, there is the Sforza Castle. Mohamed/the tour guide and Cristina/the anthropologist are standing in front of it.

Mohamed/the tour guide: But s/he [our immigrant friend] is much more interested in the history of Piazza Mercanti than the one of the Castle. Because the Castle is yes, is a witness of the life and of the inheritance of famous personages like Leonardo and so forth, but it has little relevance for somebody who arrived in the city. Because in our part [of the world] a castle is lived like a fort, where inside (...) there are the very rich who have everything and outside the ones who are starving. That figure strikes his/her sensibility and so s/he confronts that reality differently [than for example, a tourist]. (...) [Different European cultures and languages] are some of the things that he starts to understand by coming to the Castle, because it is a crossroad of cultures and
traditions, of languages, because all the tourists, especially European, are
fascinated by the Castle because of the name of (...) Leonardo [da Vinci] (...).
Except for our friend, who sees this Castle with diffidence. (...) I personally
entered only once in the Castle and I have been here since 6 years (...).
[Our friend] finds himself in two conditions which are often contradictory, right?
Wanting to know and to learn, but also wanting to survive. One lives only through
work/labour, so to combine the two things is not always easy (...) It always
happens that (...) at a certain moment s/he receives a phone call from a parent
who is not well and s/he feels on his shoulder the duty to respond to those
needs. He is in a precarious situation and so what does he do? He makes
violence to himself to help them. It could be that he is not well, but he will never
tell them (...) also because he is cheated by the pictures that he sent to his
country the day after he arrived to Milan. It is all an itinerary that will always
shape his permanence in Italy, especially in the city of Milan, where there is a
very strong and beautiful cultural heredity. (...)  
(voices from back stage join Mohamed’s voice, creating a chorus) Culture
is the only thing that is left to a person even when everything is taken
away from him/her (end chorus).
Take everything away from me, but not my culture (...).

(A church bell sounds)

So, returning to the itinerary of our friend, following the footsteps of people who
flow to the Cadorna station (...), there s/he will see another dimension of the
city, because for sure s/he will have more refusals than [there are] days in the
year (...). S/he sells but s/he will also need information. Perhaps s/he is hungry,
or there is something s/he needs, s/he (...) uses the languages s/he knows, but
often s/he gets ridiculous answers. (...) The prejudice is very rooted from both
sides (...) probably everyone has seen in him the potential vuccumpra (...).
Doing interculture would mean to challenge this taboo: look guys, it is not like
that, (...) every individual has her/his own story, her/his own experiences, we
cannot use labels (...) then all Italians would be potential mafia members and all Africans potential vuccumpras. So in the end (...) he understands that his permanence in Italy will not always be a mousse au chocolat.

(...)

[Sometimes a person] finds her/himself with our friend potential vuccumpra who wants to sell her/him a CD. So s/he refuses rudely. Yes, but in the end (...) s/he walks ten steps and then comes back, and says: “Sorry, I did not mean it”. This establishes a connection, a relationship: (...) “Sorry, I did not mean it, this is not a day”.

So the human reaction [of the CD vendor] would be “But why it is not a day? The sun has risen, and it will set in a little while. Why it is not a day?” (...) “No, (...) it is not a day, because of a personal situation, (...) because I am going through unhappy times”.

So there one starts to do interculture, because in our part [of the world] is always necessary to enjoy life – why? Because there is the knowledge that

(voices from back stage join Mohamed’s voice, creating a chorus)

whatever we have, someone else desires it very much and lives it like a distant dream (end chorus)

(...). In Milan one would say ciappo la vita come la ven [in Milanese dialect], which means to look at the positive aspects of life - which is what our immigrant friend was saying after all. And so,

(voices from back stage join Mohamed’s voice, creating a chorus) even if the world seems so old, the beginning of the future emerges always from the past (end chorus).

So this will bring our [presumably Italian] friend to reflect: (...) he who leaves his land, his country, his loved ones, (...) perhaps coming here from a place where there is no winter, where is always warm, and finds himself here in a cold, grey, country (...) he still finds the strength to smile at me and to tell me: come on, don’t give up, you can do it (...). [This] will bring this other friend of his [the Italian] to confront her/his problems.
All the encounters, all the relations, are born from this itinerary. That Italian friend the next day will spontaneously pass by, (...) only because s/he will want to chat some more. There begins that voyage of encounter that sooner or later will cause her/him to say: “But you, do you like doing this work?” And the automatic response: “I have no choice”.

So [the Italian] will (...) look among his friends and (...) relatives for anyone who could help. (...) The majority of us who have found a job have found it this way. They are relationship which last our whole lives. And most of us have a child whose Italian name, how to say it? The choice of that name is given from that experience. Thus, here [the street] is not only a crossroad of cultures, of people who come and go, here life stories are born. Here are born more positive aspects than negative (...). Until there is life, there is hope. The hope of each of us is to be able one day to give to this city what we have in our heart, that is our knowledge that

(voices from back stage join Mohamed's voice, creating a chorus)
whatever we have, someone else desires it very much, and lives it like a distant dream (end chorus).

Here ends our itinerary.

**City wars**

And here ends also our play. One of the many things that I learned from Mohamed’s performance is that perhaps we could come to appreciate public space as what could make it possible for us to switch between positions, to follow other people’s itineraries, and to at least fleetingly participate in each other’s lives and identities. This does not mean that we are all positioned equally in the city.

Mohamed is very aware of the constraints facing less privileged residents of Milan and the deep inequalities that structure Milanese society. He talks very clearly of immigrants’ experiences of cramped, unaffordable housing, of daily
discrimination and labeling, of the hardships they encounter when work is slow. He explains that it is very difficult to find a job different than selling in the street, and that it is necessary to know somebody even for being considered for employment. He also shows how vendors' experience of the city is marked by tiring daily journeys, especially in winter when it is very cold and they have to stay long hours outdoors. Yet his narration and journey through the city highlights both the limitations and possibilities of sociality in public space. It poses the question: what if? What if differently positioned people could encounter each other in public space? What if they/we could engage in “interculture”?

The performative structure of his talk is important for the creation of this imaginary. By using streets and plazas as stages, Mohamed establishes a complex correspondence between speaking and moving, walking and telling, or the itinerary and the story. One is created by the other. By tracing parallel journeys and maps through the city, he crafts an open text, where the listener can move and imagine different voices, experiences, and positionalities. In this way, I felt that Mohamed called me to witness the very possibility and power of the imagination. As both Fabian (1990) and Thrift point out, performance in this case can “expand the existing pool of alternatives” (Thrift, 2003: 2021) and the repertoire of ideas, dreams, and memories available to us.

This is no small feat, if we consider, as Dolan does, that imagination might be the necessary bridge towards utopia. According to her, theatre is a public practice through which the “field of the possible is (...) opened beyond that of the actual” (Ricoeur, 1991 quoted in Dolan, 2005: 89). Glancing alternative
possibilities to the status quo helps us see utopia not at a fixed state which can
never be reached, but as a process, a desire, and an affect, which emerge in
particular moments in our daily lives.

In the context of urban space, the experience of this imagination might
courage us to search for those moments in which public space is created
through extraordinary, everyday encounters – as the one enacted by Mohamed
in his concluding vignette. The word “enacted” is here crucial. Mohamed's tour,
rather than talking about public space, creates a framework in which it can
fleetingly exist. By performing streets and plazas as complex journeys of hope,
sociality, and discovery, he fashions a place and time in which people and
positionalities that might otherwise not interact with one another, can confront
and add to each other. To borrow Mohamed's beautiful metaphors, he offers an
ephemeral moment in which they can make music together or try on new
dresses, while always being aware of the gap between notes, or of the subtle
distance between bodies and garments.

Placed somewhere between a formal theatre play and an unstructured,
daily walk in the city, Mohamed's intervention could then be a provocative
companion to Dolan's question:

How can performance model civic engagement in participatory
democracy? How might performance let us rehearse truly
democratic public practices through a kind of social mimesis? That
is, instead of art imitating life, how might we bend life to imitate
theater, with its necessity for attentive listening, for dialogic
reciprocity, for the company (and kindness) of strangers? (Dolan,
2005: 90)
Mohamed’s walk suggests that streets and plazas can provide at times an answer to these questions. Utopian public space, “with its necessity for attentive listening, for dialogic reciprocity, for the company (and kindness) of strangers,” and for vision as an embodied witnessing and a critical act of representation, can at times “model civic engagement in participatory democracy”. I find this idea particularly precious in a city where history has been largely fought out in the streets. For one, Mohamed’s words alert us to the acts of performance that often characterize these conflicts and the making of their memories. For the other, they remind us that while this performativity helps constitute the urban terrain as an unresolved site of struggle, it can also encourage the spatial and social imagination that creates public space as an extraordinary daily possibility.

Mohamed’s narration might then be helpful in illuminating a series of events – three rallies and two epitaph installations - which happened in Milan almost exactly one year after the walking tour represented above. Considering the demonstrations and placards after having walked with Mohamed, we can see that they too, albeit in a different way, use plazas and streets as stages in order to tell the history of Milan. In turn, the events of March 2006 evidentiare once more that Mohammed’s words are not simply a story about Milan. Because streets and plazas are crucial political sites - media and results of on-going struggles - his journey is an act of engagement that helps shape the city itself, its landscapes, and identities.

On Saturday morning, March 11, 2006, a demonstration took place in one of the major shopping avenues, Corso Buenos Aires (the one Moroni describes -
in Chapter Three - as one of the most Americanized of the city, and part of a
hostile approach to the centre). It was unauthorized by the city and organized—
so it was reported - by people associated with the Milanese Social Centers (see
Chapter Three). This rally was a counter-demonstration to a fascist parade that
had been planned by *Fiamma Tricolore* (Italy’s far-right political party) for that
afternoon, and that had been authorized by the municipality.

For reasons and mechanisms unknown, during the morning rally a group
of young demonstrators started burning cars, smashing shop windows, and
injuring a group of policemen. About 20 to 30 people were arrested for this
action. In an additional surprising turn, bystanders charged the demonstrators
who had been held up by the police, who then found themselves in the ironic
position of having to defend their own captives. This is how Ansa Italy reported
the events:

The demonstration of the social centers, at noon, started within a
very tense climate. About 200 youths, many of them with helmets,
with their faces covered with balaclavas/masks, with wooden sticks
in their hands, marched from the Lima Plaza to Porta Venezia [also
a plaza], where there was a numerous anti-riot police force [waiting]
for the non-authorized rally.
There was a dense throwing of stones and firecrackers (...) against
the police. The demonstrators from the social centers also set wood
bundles and garbage cans on fire close to the *caselli* [two little
buildings that were once part of the historic city wall] of Porta
Venezia. The police [literally: “the forces of public order”] threw tear
gas while the firefighters succeeded in extinguishing a fire from a
scooter and a newspaper stand; the firefighters could not however
come close to some cars which were also engulfed from the
flames. (...)The shocked mass of bystanders turned their anger
against the 2-300 demonstrators who had unleashed the disorders,
when the latter were held by the police. Just barely, in fact, could
the agents save them [the demonstrators they had arrested] from a
real lynching: large groups of people were beating them, shouting
"kill them!" while the police was hardly managing to load them into the vans. A store, close to the corner of Corso Buenos Aires and Viale Regina Giovanna, went up in flames, like two cars that were close by (…). The flames were cordoned off by firefighters, who also evacuated many apartments of the building, invaded by the smoke. ("Centri Sociali …", 2006)

Meanwhile, in the afternoon, the authorized right wing manifestation took place undisturbed, following the same route as the morning rally. A couple of hundred people, escorted by police, paraded invoking the name of Mussolini, shouting fascist slogans, displaying Italian and Fiamma Tricolore party flags, and performing the roman salute.

These two rallies and their dynamic sparked yet another public display. The following Thursday, March 16, the business owners of the area (Corso Buenos Aires) organized a torchlight demonstration against the violence of the Saturday morning rally – thus becoming a rally against a rally against a rally.

According to Corriere della Sera, about 5000 people participated, including several political parties (but carrying no political party flags or signs):

The torchlight rally started a few minutes after 8 pm (…). Many [are] the Milanese and Italian flags that are being carried by the demonstrators in Corso Buenos Aires, where (…) the windows and awnings of shops have remained lit in sign of protest. (…) A plaquard with the writing “the city that lives wins” opens [that is: is carried by the front row of] the rally. (“Prodi e Fassino…”, 2006)

Reading the above descriptions from the papers (unfortunately I was not in Italy at the time, so I could not be part of those events), just after re-listening to Mohamed’s commentary, I was struck by how these reports themselves sounded like stage directions. I could not help but rethink the comment by Pasolini, one of Italy’s major theatre writers and film directors:
The archetype of the theatre occurs before our eyes every day in the street, at home, in public meeting places, etc. In this sense, social reality is itself a performance that is not entirely unaware of its being such and has, therefore, its own code. (Pasolini, 1983, quoted in Van Watson, 1989: 23)

In Corso Buenos Aires, the burning cars in the morning, the roman greetings in the afternoon, and the torches of the evening (to name just a few) responded to each other as they created a very complex choreography. By this I do not mean that it was not serious business. On the opposite. The very chain effect of these public displays confirms once more how the streets can, and often are, highly contested and important locales for cultural, economic, and ideological warfare, and for the negotiation of social realities. After all, the “five days” of Milan that Mohamed was talking about earlier refers to an 1848 battle (more precisely from March 18 to 22 of that year) in which the residents of the city built barricades in streets and plazas to free their town from Austrian rule.

Especially fascist and left wing forces have historically engaged in conflicts which marked the urban environment and the memory of city places (see for example Foot, 2001: 14). It is perhaps telling in this respect that the two women over 80 I talked to during my research remembered the end of fascism as that day in April 1945 in which Mussolini’s and his fiancé’s body were hung on one of the central Plaza of Milano, Piazzale Loreto. Coincidentally, and perhaps ironically, this very same plaza is also one of the end points of Corso Buenos Aires, and thus was one of the locations for the March demonstrations.

Mohamed’s tour suggests that one of the reasons why streets and plazas are such important medium for the negotiation of social realities and the
constitution of political identities might be because they are open to the very possibility of performance and performativity (see also Freeman, 2001; Fleetwood, 2004). To say it simply, people routinely appropriate streets and plazas to represent, embody, and reinterpret identities and spaces, thus participating in on-going debates on public histories and meanings. This, of course, can be as easily progressive as it can be conservative, repressive or totalitarian (as the events in Corso Buenos Aires remind us).

In using the term “performance” in this context, I would like here to expand its meaning from a more specific and formal theatrical genre to a more metaphorical understanding of the term (without losing sight of the porous boundary between the two). A large body of literature has been focusing on performance in the context of everyday life to bring attention to speech and language “as social action” (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 62). Rather than isolating and privileging the content of what people say, a performative framework helps us consider “to [and with] whom, when, how, and why” (Fabian, 1990: 8) people engage in acts of telling, retelling, listening, and remembering. Scholars who attend to how people enact identities, spaces, and social relations seek in this way to analyze both the social constructed-ness of the world and the ways in which people add new twists and meanings to discourses, systems and situations. To say it with Gregson and Rose, the notion of performativity helps us look at the “creativity … and uncertainty”, of daily life (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 434). This creativity, as noted by Thrift (2003) is politically significant, as it includes the ways in which people often, so-to-speak, interfere with the script.
Public spaces work well as informal, metaphorical stages for a variety of reasons. As Fleetwood points out regarding public transit, public spaces present a mix of anonymity and spectatorship. Although to a lesser degree than when on board buses, by being together in busy streets and plazas, people are “forced to bear witness” (Fleetwood, 2004: 37) to others’ appearances, words, and movements. There is, so to speak, no place outside of the stage. This being confronted with other people’s realities, ideas, and experiences is after all, what makes public space so important for participatory democracy (Caldeira, 2000). As Mohamed exemplifies, public spaces are also replete with layers of meanings, events, and memories. The traces of these stories can be harnessed to perform other ones and in so doing to reinterpret the past and the future. Moreover, because “identity is not a state of being but one of doing” (Fleetwood, 2004: 40), public space serves as one of the arenas where our iterative gestures, poses, words and movements crystallize who we are both for ourselves and for others (see also Guano, 2007, and Del Negro, 2004).

Mohamed’s walk suggests that we look at public space as an assembly of stages framed by particular publics, interests, events, and stories. Public memory is particularly apt at being displayed, performed, or obliterated in public urban locales. Signs, monuments, expositions, parades, and murals are just some examples of the many ways in which collective recollections are made, maintained, and reframed. Yet memory, like vision, is not simple, transparent, or fixed. Remembering Mohamed’s play with what can and cannot be seen, we may ask: how does the violence of burning cars become much more visible and
understandable than the violence of enacting a certain type of remembrance? For whom and in which “regime of the visual” (Guano, 2002: 305) is one clearer than the other?

Interestingly, the Social Center Leoncavallo responded to the accusation that youth from the Social Centers participated violently in the morning rally by reminding the city of the tragic disappearances and forgettings which mark the history of Milan. These include the murder of Dax, one of the youth from the Social Centers whose death (in 2003) anniversary falls on March 16, and the killing of Fausto and laio on March 18, 1978 (see Chapter Three). The latter case has been recently archived without finding out who shot the two young members of the Leoncavallo, but many believe that it was “a political murder against the left” (www.faustoeiaio.org) and that it happened because Fausto and laio were involved in an anti-drug campaign (see Membretti, 2003: 92). According to the Leoncavallo, it is important to understand and evaluate the current events as part of wider conflicts between fascist and progressive forces which have involved urban spaces in Milan at least since the late ’60s and which have direct linkages to political elections and governance. (That the rallies happened some weeks before the municipal elections adds another dimension to all this).

Mohamed’s words and the comments of Leoncavallo help us understand some of the links between space and memory that emerged during that week. The situation indeed became also a conflict about the public memory of violence. On March 18, just two days after the third rally, in a night blitz, municipal officers replaced an epitaph in Piazza Fontana, the theatre of the 1969 bombing by yet
unknown perpetrators. The sign, that commemorated Giuseppe Pinelli, the anarchist who lost his life in police custody in conjunction with the bombing, suddenly declared that Pinelli “died” instead of “being killed”. A few days later, on March 23, the anarchist association Ponte Della Ghisolfa re-placed the sign that had been in Piazza Fontana since 1978. This is thus how the plaza and the two signs looked like in March 2006:

![Image of the signs in March 2006]

*Figure 53
Photo © 2006 Enrica Sacconi, by permission.*

*The sign to the left reads:*
To Giuseppe Pinelli anarchist railway worker killed innocent in the rooms of the police of Milan on 16/12/1969. The students and the democratic people of Milan.

*The sign to the right reads:*
Municipality of Milan. To Giuseppe Pinelli anarchist railway worker innocent who died tragically in the rooms of the police of Milan on 15/12/1969.

Although Mohamed’s tour seems at first sight ‘just a story’, and these rallies and events as ‘real war’ their juxtaposition highlights the power of performance and the performative aspect of power. Several authors come to mind here. Taylor, in her analysis of the Dirty War in Argentina in 1976-83, argues that the dictatorship
used spectacles to create consensus and to consolidate the power of the regime. These public enactments included the embodiment of the state by the three national leaders, the “[s]taging [of] order” (Taylor, 1997: 67) and masculinity by the military, and the representation of the hero as a “lone soldier” fighting against the forces of death, femininity, and moral decline (ibid.: 73ff). Guano suggests that performances can not only legitimate the ruling powers, but also undermine them. Discussing the fall of President Menem in the Argentina of the 1990s, she shows how teachers on strike and the population who was supporting them used rallies and demonstrations to cast themselves as the protagonist of their country and of political dissent. In this way, they were able to displace the government from centre stage into a role of spectator, and thus to destabilize the “modalities of seeing, displaying, watching, and being seen” (Guano, 2002: 303) that were so central to its politics.

Like Mohamed shows in his narration, Guano and Taylor argue that an important way in which performances sustain or challenge structures of power is by reframing and reorganizing visibilities and invisibilities. The dictatorship in Argentina, for example, was based on an “unequal visual economy it established with the public” (Taylor, 1997: 71), in which leaders were “on display” while refusing to “return the look” (ibid.). The role of vision in public space, and in creating political identities indeed brings Guano to suggest that we look at public space as a site of performative praxis, and the public sphere as the result of “largely performative arenas where agentive participation can be established through a visual economy of critical spectatorship and performative action”
Demonstrations like the ones which took place in Milan are perfect examples because, in a way, they are intensely theatrical. People taking part in them show themselves as political and social actors, and participate in the negotiation and representation of memory and social realities. Mohamed's walk however, points out that performative practices and commentaries matter not only amid crisis and dramatic events, but also in people's everyday life, as they imagine, remember, narrate, move through and use city spaces.

I juxtaposed Mohamed's tale with the March 2006 rallies because, as Thrift writes, often performances and poetics are thought of as apolitical (cfr. Thrift, 2003: 2021). As Thrift discusses, they are often seen as "arty stuff" (ibid.) detached from social engagement. Similarly, a focus on vision could be seen as irrelevant when it comes to understand and intervene in Milan's "real" world. After all - some may say - what difference does it make to the everyday conflicts and debates in the city, if we imagine with Mohamed different musicians playing together, or travel with Bellovoso and his councilors? Here I would like to suggest otherwise. Look at what happens with the streets: they are seething with mysteries of which we are always a part. They demand of us that we look twice, because, just like the two signs for Pinelli, public spaces harbour two kinds of truth. On the one hand, they are sites of exclusion, in which people of colour, women, and less privileged city-dweller are not as welcomed as others (see Guano, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Dines, 2002; Razack, 2000). On the other hand, public spaces constitute a necessary ideal, without which "inequality" might become "an organizing value" (Caldeira, 2000: 4) of city life.
Or again, look at the placards in Piazza Fontana. In a way, these signs do not just commemorate Pinelli. They themselves are strikingly similar to ghosts – companions perhaps to dismissed areas and saints with too many arms. Their significance as part of a controversy works in the same way as a "specter": "it begins by coming back" (Taylor, 1997: 30, quoting Derrida, 1994, emphasis in original)58. Like ghosts, these signs tell us that seeing is not sufficient. In fact, they literally show us that looking is not enough. By representing a contradictory message, they seem to mimic the 'seeing double' of when we do not see very well. By enacting for us a double truth and double vision, these plaquard suggest that all urban landscapes might be like Piazza Fontana: unruly e characters in a dynamic relationship with the play, through which they are made, undone, unraveled, reorganized and reinterpreted.

Considering just how complex, contested, absurd, surprising, and even outright violent the life of public spaces can be, what other tool do we have but performance, haunting stories, and alternative perspectives, to comment on it and imagine better possibilities? What other strategy but to engage people's imagination, “affect”, and the “immediacy of the now” (Thrift, 2003: 2020)? By locating hopes, creative intervention, and utopian moments in everyday encounters and common public spaces, Mohamed’s performative walk opens a dynamic space we could move, live and learn in.
CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I have investigated some of the ways in which differently positioned Milaneses see, remember, appropriate, journey in, and construct the public spaces of their city. The insights of my interlocutors show that public space is a fleeting yet necessary idea, an unequal terrain that cannot be claimed by everyone in the same ways, and a physical and discursive place to debate public history and identities. One of the arguments that I present in this thesis, is that people make public space and do not just take part in it. For this reason, when we walk, sit, and meet in the places of the city we necessarily engage with categories such as class, gender, race, age, and nationality, and we can participate in debating, confirming, and/or challenging their boundaries.

In exploring these dynamics, I have given particular attention to how public space is often (at least) two things at once. As several scholars have pointed out, streets and plazas are, in many respects, places of exclusion, where hegemonic discourses and practices marginalize many of the residents of the city. This certainly holds true in Milan, where less privileged inhabitants find it harder to claim streets and plazas than upper and middle class white Italians. These can retreat (or at least say so) from public space when they want to avoid publics they do not feel connected to, while still shaping its spaces even through their absence. Conversely, many of my interlocutors talked about public space as a vital place for work, sociality, recreation, and political action – a resource
however, that they have to actively and continuously struggle for (Dines, 2002; Moroni, 1996), both because of material processes and local representational practices.

Although public spaces can work to perpetuate discrimination, social and economic disparity, and urban exclusion, they nonetheless harbor transformational possibilities. They are important “spaces for representation” (Mitchell, 1995: 115) through which people and movements can put forth their visions of society, and where differently positioned speakers can reformulate their identities and re-write the histories of Milan. As Guano discusses in her ethnography of “theatrical political action” (Guano 2002: 306) and dissent in the Argentina of the 1990s, through their critical engagement with public spaces, people become political and social actors rather than simply “private (…) citizens” (ibid.), and “politically irrelevant being[s]” (Arendt, 1958, quoted in Guano 2002: 306). This is especially so for emerging movements, such as the association VivereMilano and the Milanese Social Centers that I have discussed in the first part of this work. Both of those groups show, albeit in a very different way from each other, that movements and networks of collective action have to necessarily occupy and engage with public space, if they want to come into existence and act upon the city (see also Lefebvre, 1991 and Mitchell, 1995).

In this dissertation I have also argued that to understand public space in Milan we need to take into account specific visual cultures; circulating discourses on aesthetic and on different visibilities; embodied and dynamic acts of seeing; and the role of things occult in the history and life of the city. I have suggested
that vision - as an idiom and a practice - and (in)visibilities as avenues and results of processes of “place making” (Tsing, 2000: 338) illuminate both the working of powerful categories and processes that shape spaces and identities, as well as people’s interpretations of and interventions in those social forces. People become visible and/or unseen in the city in many different ways, places, and times, depending on their social positions in Milan and in wider economic, cultural, and political contexts. In turn, their acts of looking, recognizing, and making themselves seen (or not) reflect and negotiate social relations and structures of power. Furthermore, because the visuality of public space is constructed by a complex traffic of bodies, gazes and images, in this thesis I have sought to explore the relationship between embodiment and acts of vision. To say it simply, seeing helps situate a person in a landscape and a social context, and in turn one’s daily movements in the city fashion perspectives from where to engage in “visual intermingling” (Pinney, 2002: 364) with different publics.

In all of this, public space emerges as something that is small and ordinary, and close to people’s everyday lives, while being at the same time also vast and extensive, shaping and shaped by wider structures, systems, and processes. In a way, while claiming and contesting public spaces can have important effects because streets and plazas are replete with social processes that extend way beyond them, it is also accurate to say that people engage with public space by virtue of it being also a small, ordinary, and familiar idea. Plazas and streets are a very immediate, and common-sensical part of people’s lives,
and one connected with many realms of subjectivities, including people’s feelings, movements, sensual experience, and memories. It is telling in this respect that several people in Milan when I described my research said: “ah, you want to know how people live the city!” (field notes, October 28, 2004)

What I want to emphasize here is that the way in which complex social practices and structures of power intersect at an ‘ordinary little place’ - like the bench by the bus stop and the small market plaza just down the road - shapes how our interlocutors and we understand those systems and processes and the forms of utopia that become available to us. As Pratt (1988) so beautifully narrates, when we go for a walk, our directions, journeys, and encounters are shaped by what we can do and who we can be on those streets. In turn, because history, power differentials, and complex identities become intelligible as they are embodied in simple gestures, a look, a conversation, or a walk in our neighbourhood, those itineraries and social interactions can at times realize temporary spaces from where we can understand and possibly change the city around us.

Here, in thinking about the transformational role of public spaces, I am not forgetting that people use them for rallies and riots, for political campaigning and petitions, for revolutions and strikes, or to demonstrate against oppressive governments and regimes. Amid those more dramatic and obvious struggles, however, I want to remember that the very smallness and ordinariness of public space can also be an avenue for social change. To say it differently, public spaces can be at times liberatory, because, by virtue of their surprises, their
openness, their daily re-creation and enactment, and their multiple connections with time, they provides us with moments in which we are called to witness and to represent, to use fantasy and imagination along with critical thinking, thus learning, as Spivak puts it, some “lessons otherwise” (Spivak, 1992, quoted in Gordon, 1997: 25).

This way of looking at public space then echoes what Dolan describes as a utopia in different terms, not as a result of an impossible and comprehensive plan, but rather as a process which can accompany some of the interactions and moments in our everyday life. What she envisions is a “utopia not stabilized in its own finished perfection, not coercive in its contained, self-reliant, self-determined system, but a utopia always in progress, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experience” (Dolan, 2005: 6).

While Dolan talks about performance, I find that many of the characteristics of theatre that she described as conducive to utopia are also strikingly illuminating for public space. Borrowing her ideas to think about plazas and streets, I find myself noticing the “ephemerality” and “fleetingness” (Dolan, 2005: 8) of lived public space as it is used, activated, created and reconstructed in everyday life; its multi-stranded relation with time – because of the way in which the present, past and future intersect in it and inhabit it -; and the way in which people co-inhabiting the city in a particular space and context can at times conjure “temporary communities” (Dolan, 2005: 10). And if Dolan writes that “performance allows us to see utopia as a process of spending time” (Dolan,
2005: 13), I would like here to end my writing by saying that public space, with its many contradictions and dilemmas, and its multiple layers of uses, publics, and memories, can sometimes do that too. It "allows us to see utopia as a process of spending time" with others, in a way that would challenge what we take for granted, and thus perhaps change some of the ideas, relations and processes that shape and structure the cities we inhabit, the ones we are coming from, and the ones in which we are hoping to live (cf. Zenobia, 2005).
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Mitchell, Don and Lynn A. Staeheli

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Mudu, Pierpaolo

Murer, Bruno

Narayan, Kirin

Nicolini, Kim
Osservatori Naga

Paltrinieri, Anna Casella

Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar

Pink, Sarah

Pinney, Christopher

Portelli, Alessandro

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Prodi e Fassino Disertano la Fiaccolata

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S. Rav.

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Soglio

Soley-Beltran, Patrícia

Steedly, Mary Margaret

Stewart, Kathleen

Taylor, Diana

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Thrift, Nigel

Tsing, Anna

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt

Tupeshka, Tammie

Van Watson, William

Vecchi, Benedetto

Verga, Rossella

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Wolbert, Barbara

Yanagisako, Sylvia
Zajczyk, Francesca

Zajczyk, Francesca and Guido Cavalca

Zontini, Elisabetta

Zukin, Sharon
NOTES

1 The length of the interviews ranged from half an hour to two and a half hours. Most of them lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

2 Zajczyk calls this “subjective poverty”, referring to people’s perception of their economic and social situation.

3 Guano 2008, personal communication.

4 The VivereMilano site (www.vivere.milano.it) includes a page where people can read, post, and/or respond to comments and queries (this space was divided into subtopics after the initial first months), a mailing list (maintained by Cesare Fracca) that informs members of new activities and discussions, an archive, and a space for pictures, videos, and information.

5 This comment refers to three cases, in the preceding few months, of seniors being discovered dead in their apartments because of the social isolations they lived in.

6 As a vast literature on the anthropology of media has shown us, however, there hardly exist happy, completely submitting audiences (see for example Mankekar, 1999). Therefore, we must remember that people reinterpret, use and disrupt even the best orchestrated and planned performances and images. Moreover, Guano (2002) shows that spectacles and theatricality should not be thought of “as exclusively a tool for obscuring the workings of power and silencing critical debate” (Guano, 2002: 306; emphasis in original). Rather, they can also serve as a “modality for the public negotiation of citizenship” (ibid.). As I discuss in Chapter Seven, theatricality can be a vehicle for social critique and for an active engagements with spaces and publics.

7 As Guano (2008; personal communication) points out, this “mandatory leisure” has led to the cementification of many places and a booming tourism in the nearby regions. In an additional ironic turn, some of the 30 years old might be especially eager to leave the city in the weekend if they are living with their parents, and/or might be able to do so exactly because they can use their parent’s recreational houses on the seaside or the mountains.

8 This in spite of common remarks/complaints that the centre and Piazza del Duomo have been “taken over” by non-Italian immigrants to the city and do not belong to “Milanese” people anymore (see also Dines, 2002, for the discussion a similar process in Naples).

9 This focus on “a-politics” is especially interesting considering that Berlusconi’s party and allies have been ruling Milan also by promoting an anti-political stance (Guano, 2008).

10 See Chapter Five, for a reflection on ghosts, and Chapter Six for a discussion on some Italian-Milanese retreat from the promenading in the centre.
Estimates of the numbers of Social Centers are often tentative, as many of them have short lives. New Centers are opened all the time, as old ones close, move/are dislocated, and/or resurface in different forms.

The literature agrees that Social Centers escape definitions and sociological theorizing. See for example Vecchi (1994).

Resistance against different form of fascism has always been an integral part of the existence of Social Centers. This fundamentally political and historical conflict has often been accompanied by police repression, and by violent conflicts between rightwing street groups and the Social Centers. Moroni (1989), for example, talks about a veritable war within the city and Franca recalls: "Here the killings are multiplying. The ones of Genova, and these, and it is not a small thing, starting from Fausto and Iaio, (...) At the Leoncavallo [youth], and it was full, a tree full of photographs, full eh? Of the youth of the Social Centers that have been killed. That have been killed, not that have died" (January 18, 2005).

See also Quagliata (1994) for a history of the destruction and reconstruction of the Leoncavallo.

This is also the time of the "historic deal" between the left and the Christian Democratic party, which was greatly disadvantageous for the institutional left (see Ginsborg, 2003).

Church spaces that work as community centers - that adults and children residing in the area of the parish can use to play, to socialize, and to organize specific activities - are widely used in the city, and are usually known as oratori. They usually consist of a section of the church building and its courtyard, and serve as places of religious education, recreation facilities, headquarter for social services, cinema halls, and more, and range from conservative to progressive.

To say it simply, Christian society would mirror itself and be represented in inclusive and egalitarian public space. The latter is then a place of transformation, because it can facilitate the realization of an ideal community in the here and now of our daily life. This was echoed also by the other young priests I met during my research, and reflected in the fact that they were all keenly interested in public space. Again, these ideas, as expressed by some of my interlocutors, do not reflect the historical role of the Catholic Church in Italy, and its relationship with the state, powerful elites, and the organization of urban spaces through time.

It is in the Brera area, close to the centre (see map in the Introduction). This area, traditionally known for its many cafes and the artists who lived and worked there, is now a very expensive, elegant zone, with many clothing and fashion accessories boutiques.


Moreover, the sexualized component of the model's work also refer both to the gender roles perpetuated by much fashion commercial and to the very similar looking action of prostitutes – both Italian and immigrants - who also show their bodies to men inside cars.

The pleasant surprise ("Modelle Lavavetri", 2007) of drivers watching the models relies on and strengthens the contrast between desirable and undesirable bodies in public space.
In the Armani mega-store, similarly, sales personnel are all dressed in black, in stark contrast to the completely white store and its quiet, rarefied atmosphere.

This quote from Calvino’s *Invisible cities* was one of the things inspiring the workshop “Building Zenobia” that explored and re-imagined Milan’s dismissed areas.

Consider the example of people migrating without papers across the Mediterranean. Their boats are at the same time metaphorically and literally not seen by ships that could intercept them, but also rescue them in an emergency, and this has had the most tragic consequences for hundreds of people.

On March 13, 2005 (the day I attended), for example, activities at the Stecca and in the park included a clothing exchange, a children’s concert and activities, two film screenings, a discussion with John Foot, a biking tour through the neighbourhood, a group game on critical consumption, and a photographic exposition about the Isola area.

Unfortunately, I could not attend this event. My information on it is based on the written description from the flyers, and the conversations with some of the activists at the Stecca degli Artigiani prior to the event.

As Foot describes. Sesto San Giovanni has been particularly affected by deindustrialization and the emergence of dismissed areas. In 1997, for example, these areas amounted to an incredible “third of the whole area of town” (Foot, 2001: 174).

Here I want to point out that the internet and real spaces are not antagonist but intimately connected. Internet mediates people’s access to certain spaces, events, news and interpretations on the city. Although the internet is obviously not accessible to everyone, it is also true that many people who are at the margins, like immigrant groups and Social Centers, rely quite strongly on it. What I find interesting in this context, is how the internet allows for different modalities of seeing and showing, and thus for different representations of spaces and the social relations which shape and are shaped by them. Not that dissimilarly from *VivereMilano*, San Precario’s virtual aspect helps it become “real” in the city, and its sudden surprising appearances in public space also serve to direct people to information and debates that are not immediately noticeable in plazas and streets.

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It was the exposition “the Earth Seen From the Sky” which featured photographs of different countries by Yann Arthus-Bertrand. Maria Anacleta was particularly interested in finding and photographing this image of the Philippines.
As Granata et al (2003) discuss, these churches have been lent to the Filipino community by the local church administration. Indeed, in recent years priests from the Philippines, from Latin America, and other countries have been working with immigrant communities all over the city. According to Granata et al, the use of catholic churches by Filipino people results in a certain autonomy of the community, which can organize their own festivities, events, and religious practices, while at the same time constituting a material link with Italian employers. The latter in fact can contact the churches or parishes to find a person to hire. This permits members of the community to maintain a privileged position in the caretaking and service market (Granata et al, 2003: 147). At the same time, however, this creates a particular mix of visibility and invisibility in the city. While the Filipino community can congregate in these churches, it can never really claim them as their own, as they remain under local Milanese authority (ibid.).

Differently from Maria Anacleta who directed the photographing process, Francesca insisted that I “carry out all the work” and all the decisions regarding photographs. During our tours, I photographed the sites, buildings, churches, shops, and signs she showed me. At the end of our tours, I showed her the pictures for feedback, and she felt that they represented accurately enough the itineraries she guided me through. Because the focus of Francesca’s itinerary was to see and appreciate the beauty in town, we both felt that those pictures were a standard way of representing and acknowledging this interest.

This shop is not one of the boutiques pointed out by Francesca. However, Francesca and I discussed this picture as an example of the relationship between the outside and the inside of stores, and of how glass windows reflect people and places making them become part of the very architecture of retailing.

Milanese is currently spoken mostly by elderly people, although some middle age persons may also use it. It is very rare to find younger people who can understand it or speak it. An elderly woman I interviewed, who had spoken it at home with her parents and still used it exclusively with her husband, described it as the language of the working class, and remembered that all the upper class families with whom her parents worked spoke only Italian. Today, however, Milanese is much less associated with class than with Milanese identity.

Caldeira’s work offers an interesting example. In her ethnography of Sao Paolo, she describes, among other things, how ways of seeing other people (for example: the disembodied surveillance of video cameras, the constant looking for signs of class and membership between people in daily life, and the concomitant people watching and intermingling happening in other neighbourhoods) help shape people’s positions, claims to spaces, and people’s tactile, experiential ways of being in the city. In turn, the organization of Sao Paolo into a “city of walls” strengthens how one’s place in the city, experientially and socially, produces certain visions of urban spaces. For one, poorer people cannot see where the more affluent people live. (This was of interest also methodologically for Caldeira’s project, see page 11). In this process, the very marginal population is also cast out of view. The favelas themselves come to be perceived as enclaves, albeit of a very different kind. They can only be seen from “the windows of the exclusive apartments before them” (Caldeira, 2000: 310). Although the latter is the typical “vision from above” of the powerful, it is only one kind of seeing in the city of walls and is itself enabled by the very positions of privileged people, their journeys, embodied experiences and living conditions in the city.

De Certeau distinguishes between places as hegemonically constructed locations, and spaces as inhabited, lived and shaped by relations and interactions.
Women often shop for other members of their families too, or accompany them if they need to buy clothing items. In addition, women do most if not all of the washing, ironing, mending, and dry cleaning for their households. Women’s work also includes the skilful mastering of sales, of alternative shopping circuits such as open air markets and factory outlets, and the use of informal trading networks.

As Zukin (1995) discusses in regards to New York city, gentrification is often linked with the creation of visual landscapes which appeal to middle and upper class viewers.

Glennie and Thrift for example write that the “collective narcissism” (Maffesoli, 1991, quoted in Glennie and Thrift, 1996: 235) involved in practices like the *struscio* makes the crowd in the street “performative and cognitive and aesthetic” (Glennie and Thrift, 1996: 235, emphasis in original), because it creates a space where identities can be tried out, and social distinctions reaffirmed and/or reworked.

Indeed, my own ability to meet with these women in public space, to be friends with both of them, was exactly dependent on my ambivalent and contradictory “Milanese-ness” and on my status as in/outside to both women, in different ways. As a woman born and raised in Milan by Milanese parents, I was for Francesca Milanese enough that she could talk about it with me. At the same time, my research and my living away from the city made me into a potential student, somebody to show to what “Milanese-ness” is. For Maria Anacleta, my own status as immigrant and my having a divided family myself made me into an ally and a friend. The fact that I am not simply nor really “Milanese” made it easier for her to talk to me. At the same time, as an Italian friend, I also represented one more connection to the city for her.

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While the stage directions are in this sense fictional, we cannot say that the pictures are necessarily more “real”, transparent, or authentic representations. As Pink (2001) and others remind us, photographs are selected, framed, edited, etc. Indeed, the double representation of the setting is meant to remind the reader about the role of narration – both Mohamed’s during the tour, and mine in this chapter – to construct frameworks and contexts for cultural commentary.

The use of different subjects for a recent Senegalese immigrant (such as “s/he”, “one”, “the immigrant”, “our friend”, “we”/”us”, and “I”) during the narration is particularly interesting, as it often shows a switch between different “voices”. In this particular scene, for example, Mohamed’s switch from “the immigrants” to “the immigrant” to “s/he”, “one”, and “our poor immigrant friend” also signals a movement from a more detached to a more intimate perspective. What I translate as “s/he” and “one” are important mediums of these shifts, because they do not indicate who the subject really is, but leave it open to the listener’s interpretation. They often seem to beg the questions: how close is this “friend”? Is “one” just any-one or one-self? This is especially so with “s/he”. In Italian, subjects are not always required: although it is always possible, and sometimes necessary, to specify it, the subject is included in the conjugated verb form. (For example, *arriva* means (he? she?) arrives). Many of Mohamed’s sentences have such ‘absent/unspecfied subjects and I translate them as “s/he”. (I translate them as s/he even when the use of pronouns earlier in a particular passage suggests that it is a male character).
44 The ambiguity of the subject in this passage is another example of the alternating and interweaving of speaking positions: While “us” refers to the people who have lived in Milan for a long time, thus distancing the speaker from the “s/he” “who arrives”, the “our” in the line “they are eaten in our side [of the world]” denotes a speaker who is very close and familiar to the “s/he” who “is told: no, no, no, one does not touch them, one does not eat them”. So here again: who is “s/he”? And who is “one”?

45 Here is an example of several itineraries/paths intersecting: the course of the canals, the exploring paths of a newcomer through the city, international migrations, the tour of Mohamed and me through the city.

46 This is another interesting example for the coexistence of several “voices”. It could be re-written like this:

   Narrator: Following the course of the water, s/he realizes that it becomes a belt, a belt that suddenly ends behind here (…).

   The Friend: but how come [we] ended [here], in a street which on the other side is called Via Laghetto (Little Lake Street)? (…) It is strange, because here there isn't any water!

   The Voice of History: But yes, there was water: water underneath. (…)

   Narrator: So s/he continues her/his tour and cannot see another way then the Duomo.

47 The water, reaching Laghetto Street (Via Laghetto) and the Little Lake of Santo Stefano (Laghetto di Santo Stefano), carried boats with building materials for the construction of the Duomo. According to the association Friends of the Navigli (www.amicidel navigli.org), navigation to carry marmor for the Duomo started in 1387. Leonardo Da Vinci is also associated with the Navigli waterways, because he designed its lift locks (the Chiuse di Leonardo; see the map in Scene II). The part of the Navigli canals closer to the city centre, called cerchia interna, was entirely covered in the thirties. Some of the canals that were further from the centre (such as parts of the Naviglio Grande and Naviglio Pavese) are still visible today. The construction of the Duomo lasted from 1386 to the nineteenth century, earning the cathedral a reputation of a neverending work in progress.

48 In the novel Marcovaldo, of 1963, Calvino writes about a city dweller trying to catch pigeons to prepare a tasty meal.

49 The Madonnina (literally: little Madonna) is the golden statue of Mary placed on the pinnacle of the Duomo. “O mia bela madunina” is a very popular old song in Milanese dialect.

50 See Fo, 1974.

51 In our actual tour, at this point Mohamed walked away from the courtyard, returned to Dante Street (where we were in the previous scene), and started again walking away from the Duomo. He headed towards the Sforza Castle, which is about 10 minutes walk away.

52 These are types of music from South Italy. The Tammurriata Nera is an old song from Napoli. The pizzica and the tarantella are types of traditional music and dance from the regions of Puglia and Basilicata. They are linked to tarantismo, a system of trance-inducing curing rituals for people who have been bitten by Tarantula spiders. I find very interesting that the examples Mohamed uses for cultural identity and difference are musical, something which is very processual, and performative.
See for example Murer's (2003) comments on the perceptions of immigrants by many Italian residents of Milan.

In our actual itinerary, here Mohamed started to go towards the nearby Cadorna train station, where the rest of the narration took place.

In this part of his narration, Mohamed also describes how a vendor goes from one train station (Cadorna) to the other (Central Station) to sell his/her merchandise, following the commuters into and out of Milan.

Vuccumpra means literally: "wannabuy"? It is a derogatory expression to refer to a street seller, and has been used to designate North African immigrants in general.

Please see Thrift for a discussion on the methodological and theoretical importance of the "depth of the now" (Thrift, 2003: 2021).

Taylor writes: "Derrida (...) highlights the reiterative nature of haunting, for phantoms always represent a repetition: "A specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (Taylor, 1997: 30, quoting Derrida 1994, emphasis in Derrida's original)."