

Italian Feminist Journals

An Overview

On the whole feminism is alive and well in Italy, which does not mean that there is not still much to change in the fabric of society, in the lives of women, in women ourselves. There is, between the richness and quality of the debate going on in the feminist community and its concrete influence in social and political terms, a tension which often becomes a gap, sometimes engendering a feeling of tiredness and impotence. Yet, the debate is rich, its quality is first rate, and there is reason to feel confident if one is a feminist in Italy today.

In the last two years there has been a flourishing of new feminist (or feminist-oriented) publications, of which only a few will be mentioned in my notes. I have restricted myself to publications definable as "feminist" (and radical feminist, at that) in outlook and content, and "journals" in formal terms. As will be apparent, I have made some exceptions, in general privileging "feminist" political issues over formal ones. Another criterion has been that of a nationwide diffusion, not necessarily for the public at large, but certainly in the feminist community; it just would not have been possible to give an account of all the local newsletters, bulletins and even journals proper, often quite interesting in content, but circulated among a restricted audience. Since Italian feminism is very little known internationally, I have tried to offer as much detailed information and exemplification as the need for synthesis allowed; for the same reason I have included a few "has beens," no longer existing publications which are still somehow a living influence.

I shall begin with the "has been" publications, recover from the slight depression that talk of things past always engenders, then give an account of the newest born, and finally list those of longer standing as further evidence in favour of my optimistic view of the vitality of feminism in Italy. Two more remarks: most of these publications, and the exceptions are indeed few, are published either autonomously by the group who produces them, or by a feminist publishing house; none of them has links with the universities or other established cultural institutions, though the women who produce, write and read them often do — there are no institutionalized women's studies in Italy.

Paola Bono



Effe was perhaps more a monthly magazine than a journal proper, but its pioneering role in feminist information in Italy, the variety of issues which it explored during the nine years (1973-1982) of publication, and therefore its importance for and influence in the feminist movement, call for its inclusion in this overview. *Effe* was not linked to a specific tendency of Italian feminism: the product of a collective whose feminist identity coincided with the production of the magazine itself, it reflected the evolution, difficulties, contradictions and acquisitions of the movement. Sold in newspaper stands all over Italy, *Effe* greatly contributed to the diffusion of feminist ideas among women who would not otherwise come into contact with the movement's view of questions such as abortion, or violence (from rape to the subtle exploitation of advertisements), or the role of the Church in the oppression of women, not distorted by the sensationalism of mass media.

Quotidiano donna (Rome 1978-1983), a weekly sold nation-wide in news agencies, also aimed at giving women autonomous, non-mediated information, and much of what has been said for *Effe* would also apply here. *Quotidiano donna*, however, was not as elegant in design and often more radical in outlook, providing a more "in depth" treatment of themes central to the debate and political action of the movement, seen, as it were more from an insider's point of view than having in mind a larger heterogeneous audience. It also gave space to documents or *ad hoc* articles by different groups, either self-presentations of the group's rationale and position, or comments and proposals regarding specific issues.

Differenze was the voice of the Rome-based part of the feminist movement. Founded by five women from three collectives, each issue (12 altogether, from June 1976 to May 1982) was the product of a different group, thus acting as a site of expression and confrontation of these diverse instances. Of particular interest is No. 10, "Sexuality and Money," published in preparation for a conference on the same theme held in December 1979. At a time when the feminist movement was being cornered between marginalization and normalization, it treats the question of women's political presence and action

published in NOI DONNE, May 1988

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from a dual perspective — the foundation of new modes of relation among women; the individuation of ways to approach, use, change the institutions. The title points to the interpretive key adopted for the conference, i.e., an analysis of the economic rules in the light of their sexually connotated basis.

Orsaminore (Rome, June 1981-March 1983): Founded by seven women (hence the title, Orsa Minore being the Italian name of the Ursa Minor constellation), seven intellectuals of different backgrounds, bonded by friendship and by a habit of group discussion and analysis of their lives and their context, all politically "on the left" and all involved and/or intrigued by the feminist experience. An "irregular" monthly, *Orsaminore* presented and debated feminist themes, often in a broadly Marxist perspective (i.e., not tied to any orthodoxy), privileging a theoretical approach which would transcend a mere commentary on current affairs, though not forgetting the concreteness of the problems at stake.



International Women's Day March, Venice

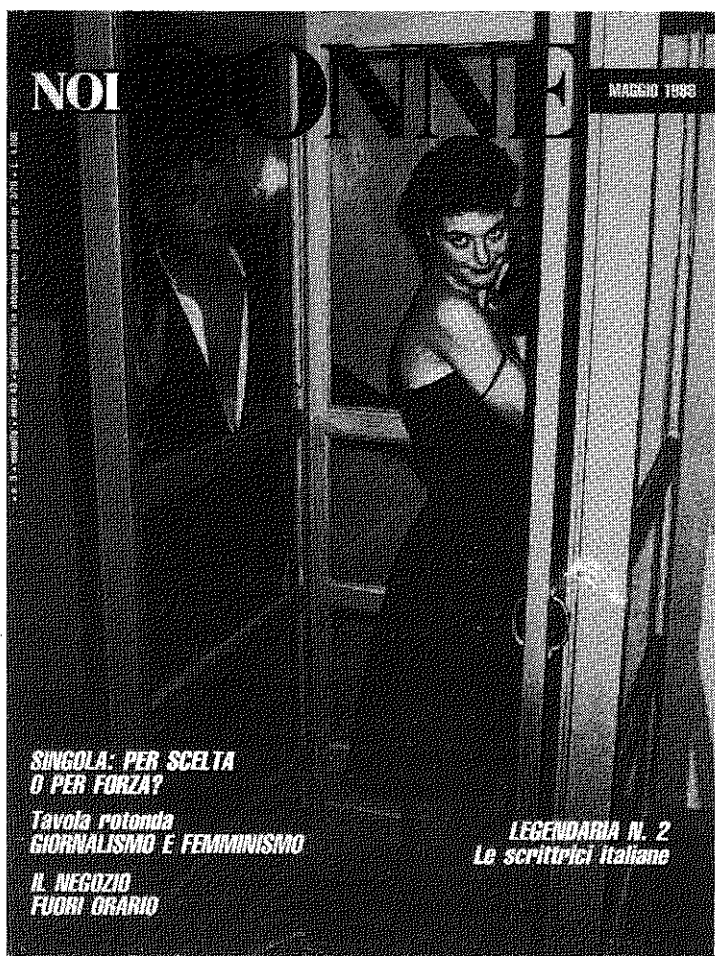
Manifesta, the "baby" among Italian feminist journals (its first issue is dated October 1988), is produced by a group of women based in Naples, already well known for their lively and often provocative cultural activity, aimed at a re-viewing and re-founding of interpretive and expressive modes. Language, and in particular the language of the cinema, is therefore privileged as a site of the complex relationship that women entertain with "images" of femininity. Literature, poetry, philosophy, visual art, theology, law, humour, all are given space in *Manifesta's* project to render manifest the richness and complexity of the female universe, and also, perhaps more, its strength and resilience. Significantly, the opening feature of the first two issues is devoted to a reappraisal of the mythical figure of the Amazon.

Aspirina, subtitled "Rivista per donne di sesso femminile" (A Journal for Women Whose Sex is Female), first issue November 1987, is produced by the *Libreria delle donne* in Milan. A satirical journal, it publishes jokes, comic strips, short parodic texts, reflecting and commenting, in an ironic and self-ironic manner, on the is-

sues currently at stake in and for the feminist movement in Italy. The capacity for synthesis which often characterizes the comic mode of expression, the pungent wit of most of the journal's collaborators, the skillful choice of targets — illustrating a partisan, caustic view of the patriarchal order (obviously!), of the feminist movement as a whole (not so common), and of the very positions the journal tendentially endorses (almost unique) — combine to make *Aspirina* not only enjoyable and lively but also a valuable though extravagant commentary on and critique of the ongoing debates about (to quote only a few) sexual difference, relations among women, Irigaray's writings, feminist politics, the link with the symbolic mother.

Reti (No. 1, September/October 1987) is slightly eccentric among this panorama of feminist journals, in view of its links with a political party; in fact, it replaces *Donne e Politica* as the journal of communist women. It is financially supported by the Communist Party and published by the party-controlled Editori Riuniti. Yet it must be included, for it reflects and illustrates the way in which feminist thought has seeped through and come to influence not "politics" at large (though that has also happened in various forms) but *women* of a specific political allegiance, reshaping their awareness of themselves as women and therefore their self-positioning inside the party to which they belong. *Reti* aims to be a motor of this process; it invites contributions by women outside the Party, actually defining itself as a journal "promoted by communist women, created together with women of different political and experiential backgrounds." Focused mainly on the areas of culture/politics/economics, it debates the possible autonomous modes of action for women with regard to, for example, bio-ethics, the labour market, parliamentary representation, the bi-sexualization of culture.

Fluttuaria's first "official" issue dates to January/February 1987, after two xeroxed issues had been informally circulated among feminists in several Italian cities and towns. Produced by an already existing group of women associated for cultural and recreational purposes, who have been in the past and still are influential in Italian feminism, the journal seeks to provide expression for all women engaged in the



construction of an autonomous interpretation and experience of reality. It features articles and notices about cinema, theatre, literature, politics, science, work, sport, medicine, always in the perspective of a female eye looking at and reshaping the world, attempting to give voice to sexual difference as an active principle at work in the perception/creation of reality, at the same time stressing the multiplicity of points of view present in the feminist community regarding such a process and its practical forms: differences inside difference, to be acknowledged and accepted.

Lapis, "Percorsi della riflessione femminile" (Itineraries of female thought), born in November 1987 out of a split in *Fluttuaria's* editorial board, testifies to the richness and diversity of such itineraries, but also — perhaps not a positive sign — to the truth of that old proverb "there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip." In other words, acknowledging differences might be easy, accepting them and being able to live with them is quite another matter. To outsiders, the subtle political and emotional reasons for the split are not easily apparent. In endorsing the wish for the explication of a wide and varied range of positions, and the necessity of an unprejudiced confrontation and exchange, *Lapis* underlines the importance of the experiential dimension of knowledge, the need to take into account the uniqueness of the

individual subject and the weight of affective processes, their relevance for and correlation to social and political action.

Noi donne has undergone a number of transformations since it was founded in 1944 — when Italy was still occupied by the German Army — as a clandestine leaflet of partisan women. When the war ended it became, at first as a bi-weekly, then as a weekly from 1948, the magazine of the U.D.I. (Unione Donne Italiane, Union of Italian Women), an association of left-wing women, mostly belonging to the Communist and Socialist parties. The reasons for its inclusion in this article are similar to those given for *Reti*: feminism is contagious, and the U.D.I. — after strong and at times bitter disagreements with the movement — has in some ways become part of it, severing completely its links with "the father," i.e., the political parties. The magazine has changed accordingly, going through an especially radical phase in 1982-84. From 1983 it has again become a monthly; a typical issue (80-100 pages) includes comments and surveys on current affairs, a dossier on a specific theme prepared autonomously by a group who arranges to take over that space from the editorial board, features on cultural events, book/cinema/theatre reviews. All with a feminist slant.

Sottosopra was initially (1973) created by women of various feminist groups in Milan as a space open to the experience and elaborations of the movement in all its instances and expressions, in order to foster communication and debate. Two issues are particularly worth remembering, devoted each to an important nationwide meeting — one about abortion in 1975, the other about "the state of the movement" in 1976. From December 1976 *Sottosopra* becomes the voice of one of the most interesting and influential groups in Italian feminism, *Libreria delle donne* in Milan (see below). Its irregular appearance is linked to the modes and rhythms of reflection of the group, who publish a new issue whenever (and only if) they feel they have come to satisfactorily articulate a position they wish to circulate and discuss. The re-thinking or the relationships between/among women, the need for a bi-sexualization of the world which will allow women to live in it "at their ease"

qua women (instead of having to assume male parameters), the question of political representation and of its pitfalls: on these themes *Sottosopra* has sparked a lively, at times ferocious, debate in the Italian feminist community.

DWF ("Donnawomanfemme"), founded in 1976 by women engaged in various fields of research inside and outside academia, the first journal in Italy to try and bridge the gap between the culture of the feminist movement (with its emphasis on personal experience, spontaneity, the oral mode of communication) and "traditional" culture (the need for rigorous research, the stress on objectivity) in order to envisage a different relation between the subject and the object of knowledge. The themes of the monographic issues (22 until 1982, plus two more in 1984-85) often were the same being debated in the movement, for example: feminism and institutional politics (No. 4); solidarity, friendship and love between/among women (No. 11/12); reflections towards a feminist epistemology (No. 15) — but re-proposed in a historical perspective, at a more theoretical level and with a view to making known the research on those questions being carried on in other countries. 1986 marked the beginning of *DWF's* new series: a different formula, a different editorial board (though with some continuity), a different graphic project for a more open politico-theoretical journal, actively engaged in the re-evaluation of the feminist experience (and of the knowledge it has produced) as well as, or as a means for, the foundation of a "politics" of sexual difference. Particularly interesting are No. 1, which explores the potentialities of "I like it, I don't like it" as a cognitive category, and No. 4, on the concept of *appartenenza*, i.e., belonging, pertaining, being a part of — a sex, a gender, the feminist movement, an institution...

Leggere donna, as the title (Reading Woman) signals, is basically a reviews journal, a sort of Italian *Women's Review of Books*. It also includes: information and comments about the cultural activities of individual women and women's groups throughout Italy (i.e., exhibitions, shows, cycles of lectures, conferences and seminars); feature articles on political issues such as equal opportunities for women (or the case of Silvia Baraldini, imprisoned for

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"conspiracy" in the USA following a trial whose legality raises serious doubts); interviews with women (architects, film directors, scientists) actively and successfully engaged in the professions. Initially a quarterly (1980), after a short spell as a monthly in 1985-86, in 1987 *Leggere donna* became a bi-monthly.

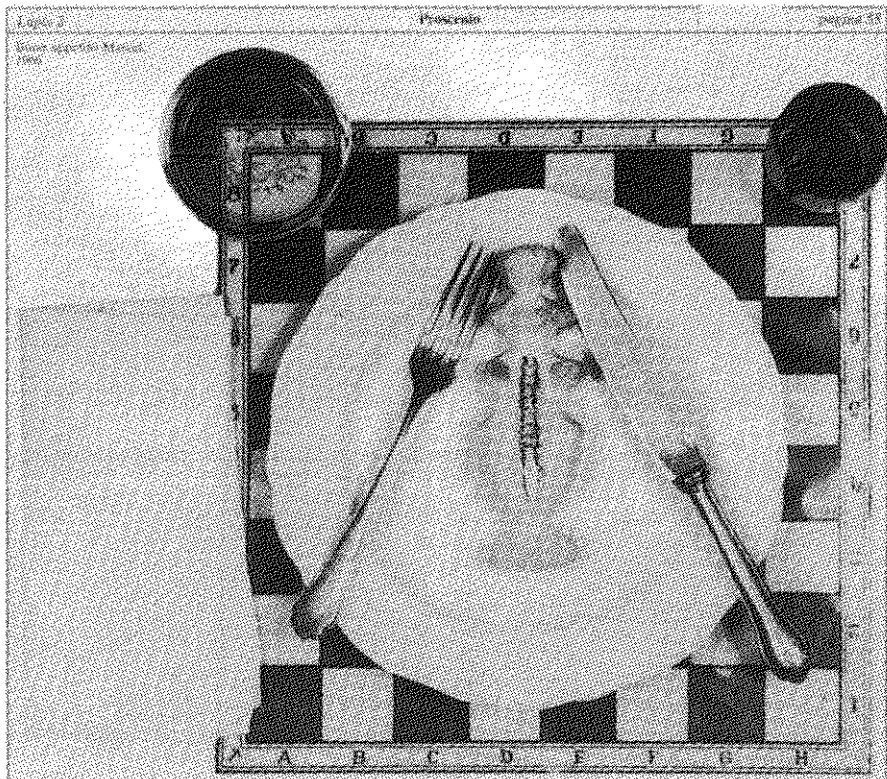
Memoria, "Rivista di storia delle donne" (a journal of women's history). Founded in 1981 by a group of women, most of them academics, engaged in the fields of history, literary criticism, psychoanalysis and the social sciences, as a contribution to that re-vision of culture fostered, in Italy as elsewhere, by the feminist movement. Acknowledging the differences of approach and with a view to their potential value for a richer understanding of reality, the editorial board's effort has been that of presenting in each issue a varied range of articles, trying to create a dialogue of positions and therefore a/many potential reading/s which go beyond the sum of the parts. Thus far 22 monographic issues have been published, on, among others, the body (No. 3), experience, memory and narration (No. 8), clothes as goods and symbols (No. 11/12), aging (No. 16); particularly worth noting are also No. 19/20, on the feminist movement in Italy in the seventies, and No. 13, on women's groups in the eighties.

A few books can be mentioned, which taken together would serve as a valuable

and diversified introduction to Italian feminism. *8 marzo. Storie, miti e riti della giornata internazionale delle donne* (Roma: Utopia, 1987): after an introductory chapter about the history of International Woman's Day, there follows a more detailed analysis of its significance in Italy from the end of the Second World War, to the high tide of feminism in the seventies, and up to the present. *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1987): "Don't think you've got any rights" is a highly subjective and idiosyncratic history of the feminist movement in Italy from the point of view of a very influential group, the "Libreria delle Donne" in Milan. *Le donne al Centro* (Roma: Utopia, 1988): the proceedings of a conference held in 1986 on a peculiar Italian phenomenon — the existence, all over the country, of numerous women's groups (more than a hundred), which assuming a formalized legal structure have constituted themselves as separate and autonomous sites of sexually connotated research in order to gather, preserve, transmit, produce culture as/for women. *La ricerca delle donne* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1988): also the proceedings of a conference, held in 1987 about the state of feminist research, with very interesting sections on history, philosophy, psychoanalysis.

Paola Bono teaches English at the University of Rome. She is an editor of DWF, *Donnawoman-femme*.

Buon appetito Marcel, 1966
published in LAPIS, March 1988



Aspirina, bi-monthly, subscription Lire 15,000 plus postage and handling, Lire 4,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Circolo Cooperativo S. Alermo, Libreria delle Donne, Via Dogana 2, Milano 20123.

DWF (Donnawomanfemme), quarterly, subscription Lire 70,000 (surface mail), Lire 12,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from DWF, Cooperativa Utopia, Via San Benedetto in Arenula 6, Roma 00186.

Fluttuaria, bi-monthly, subscription Lire 70,000 (surface mail), Lire 8,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Circolo Culturale delle Donne Cicip & Ciclap, Via Gorani 90, Milano 20123.

Lapis, quarterly, subscription Lire 60,000 (surface mail), Lire 12,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Edizioni Caposile Srl, Via Caposile 2, Milano 20137.

Leggere donna, subscription, Lire 20,000 plus postage and handling, Lire 2,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Centro Documentazione Donna, Contrada della Rosa 14, Ferrara 44100.

Manifesta, quarterly, subscription Lire 28,000 (surface mail), Lire 5,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Cooperative Le Tre Ghinee, Via Posillipo 308, Napoli 80123.

Memoria, quarterly, subscription Lire 48,000 (Europe, surface mail) and Lire 60,000 (elsewhere, also surface mail), Lire 13,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Rosenberg & Sellier, Via Andrea Doria 14, Torino 10123. (But the editorial board is based in Via della Dogana Vecchia 5, Roma 00186.)

Noi donne, subscription Lire 90,000 (surface mail), Lire 5,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Cooperative Libera Stampa, Via Trinita dei Pellegrini 12, Roma 00186.

Reti, bi-monthly, subscription Lire 48,000 (surface mail), Lire 6,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Editori Riuniti Riviste, Via Serchio 9/11, Roma 00198.

Sottasopra, Lire 4,000 plus postage and handling per issue, from Gruppo n.4, Libreria delle Donne, Via Dogana 2, Milano 20123.

