Ways of knowing place in the Italian periferia: Quarto Oggiaro revisited

This item was submitted to Loughborough University’s Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Additional Information:

- A Doctoral Thesis. Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University.

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/20172

Publisher: © Alessandro Froldi

Rights: This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Please cite the published version.
Ways of knowing place in the Italian *periferia*: Quarto Oggiaro revisited

By

Alessandro Froldi

A doctoral thesis
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
For the award of Doctor of Philosophy
Loughborough University
May 2015

© By Alessandro Froldi (2015)
Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the infinite support of a number of people and institutions. My supervisors Sarah Pink and Andrew Dainty provided me with comments and inspiring ideas throughout the process of developing this work. Loughborough University offered me both generous funding and a great setting to grow as a researcher. I would also like to thank Ivan Bargna, under whom I started to work in Quarto Oggiaro for my Master Dissertation at the University of Milan Bicocca and Virginia Giandelli, for supporting my initial encounter with Quarto Oggiaro during my year as a student at Domus Academy. In Loughborough I was very fortunate to be welcomed and supported by the Department of Social Sciences and the Department of Civil and Building Engineering. Several friends and colleagues in Loughborough made my time there a fantastic experience: Pawan Bisht, Rafaela Bianchi, Roxana Moronau, Conohar Scott, Brian Callan, Kosum Omphornuwat and Martha Worsching all provided me with warm, interdisciplinary perspectives and created a thought-provoking environment. Some of them read different stages of this work and were of great help; most of them discussed and helped me through the making of my research. In Edinburgh, Arianna Introna, Alessandro Skarlatos-Currie and Ceylan Hay read part of my work and provided me with support and enthusiasm.

My stay in Quarto Oggiaro was made special by a large amount of people that, with great patience and trust, told me their stories. I am honoured to have briefly been made part of that. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Bruno Rimoldi who will sadly not be able to read my work. Many committees, Associazioni Culturali and Charities in the neighbourhood provided me with great friendships and support, in particular Spazio Baluardo offered me friendship and collaboration beyond any expectations.

Finally I would like to thank my family, who provided me with a special place all along this journey, where I could always find support for what I was doing.
Abstract:

This thesis explores the interplay between practices of activism and planning through a focus on place. By developing an understanding of place as a multi-situated and multi-scalar concept, I show how a theoretical approach based on a revision of the concept of place can bridge and contribute to both the fields of anthropology of planning and of social movements. Providing a series of insights into the Milanese urban periferia (outskirts) this research argues that activism and planning are continuously engaged in redefining the field of political action. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, archival and historical research, my work shows the empirical interplay between planning and politics as a central arena for the shaping of broader historical and geographical tensions. A number of controversies and episodes of protest are examined to illustrate the experiences of activists and citizens involved across different periods of contemporary Milanese history. I approached these events as elements of place-making; processes where different subjectivities, practices and ideas come together as transformative, ever-changing instances.

The neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro in the extreme outskirts of the city has provided a setting for fieldwork research to address the idea of the anthropological places as the result of a mutual constitution between myself as the researcher and the people I encountered in the field who were engaged in defining their environment. This approach resulted central to producing collaborative processes and for unfolding a relational interpretation of places. By engaging with these experiences this thesis demonstrates the need for examining the categories and practices of political and planning imagination and the multiple practices of world-making to make a significant contribution to understanding the human and social contexts of modern urban realities.
Contents:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................. 2

ABSTRACT: .................................................................................................................................. 3

CONTENTS: .................................................................................................................................. 4

TABLE OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................... 7

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS: .......................................................................................................... 10

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................ 11

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS ........................................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER 1: THINKING PLACE AT THE INTERSECTION WITH POLITICS ..................................... 18

MULTIPLE PARADIGMS FOR THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF PLACE .................................................. 18

NOT SCARED OF POLITICS: THE CONTINGENCY OF PLACE AND ITS AMBIGUITIES ......................... 23

THE SHIFTING PLACE OF THE POLITICAL AND ITS IMAGINATION ........................................... 26

SUMMARY.................................................................................................................................... 28

CHAPTER 2: ENGAGING MOVEMENTS, TRAJECTORIES AND CONTROVERSIES: ANTHROPOLOGY WITH PLACES OF PLANNING CONTESTATIONS .................................................................... 29

FROM URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY TO PLANNING REGIMES: URBAN PLACES AND PRACTICES OF MODERNITY .................................................................................................................. 29

UNFOLDING POLITICS WITH PLACES: ACTIVISM AND PRACTICES OF IMAGINATION IN THE CITY ............................................................................................................................... 33

SUMMARY.................................................................................................................................... 37

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCING ENGAGEMENT, PLACING ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE ............ 39

REFLEXIVITY, RELATIONALITY AND THE MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL PLACES ........................................................................................................................... 39

TAKING POSITIONS: ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES IN THE FIELD ............................................................................................................................... 42

WALKING, WRITING AND PICTURING BEYOND THE SCALES OF THE FIELD ................................. 46

IMAGINING AND SPECIFYING ETHNOGRAPHIC ETHICS OF COLLABORATION ..................................... 50

SUMMARY.................................................................................................................................... 54

CHAPTER 4: ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTIONS: IMAGINING ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN MOVEMENT ................................................................. 56

ARRIVAL PRACTICES AND THE RE-COMPOSITION OF HOME ANTHROPOLOGY ................................. 56

DRIVING TO THE FIELD: TRAJECTORIES OF IMMERSION IN URBAN TRAFFIC .................................. 60

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC HOME: ACCOMMODATION AND DWELLING IN THE FIELD .............................. 64

THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL PLACES: MAKING A FIELDWORK ROUTINE ........... 72

SUMMARY.................................................................................................................................... 80
CHAPTER 5: IN AND OUT OF PLACE, ANTHROPOLOGY, PLANNING AND CONTESTING THE STATE IN POST-WAR URBAN ITALY ........................................................................................................................................................................ 81

ITALIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS ................................................................................................................................. 81
THE BIRTH OF THE ITALIAN PERIFERIA: PLANNING POLITICS, MODERNITY AND THE STATE ................................................................. 85
CONTESTING THE STATE: ITALIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, PLANNING AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY ........................................ 89
SUMMARY......................................................................................................................................................................................... 93

CHAPTER 6: KNOWING THE PLAN: THE PERIFERIA BETWEEN BUREAUCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONTESTATION ........................................................................................................................................................................ 94

SETTING THE SCENE: MILANESE PLANNING HISTORY, THE GRONDA AND THE OLD PERIFERIA ................................................................. 94
NEW NEIGHBOURHOODS IN A NEW PERIFERIA: RECONSTRUCTION AND URBAN MIRACLES IN MILAN ............................................. 100
SUMMARY......................................................................................................................................................................................... 110

CHAPTER 7: PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE PAST IN MILAN’S PERIFERIA ............ 111

MILITANT PHOTOGRAPHY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT ................................................................................. 111
BACK TO THE BEGINNING: YOUTH CLUBS AND EVERYDAY MILITANT ACTIVISM IN THE 1970s ................................................................. 116
PLACING QUARTO ROSSO: FROM THE STREETS TO THE ARCHIVE AND BACK ....................................................................................... 117
A PLACE OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: PIAZZA CAPUANA REVISITED ..................................................................................................... 124
SUMMARY......................................................................................................................................................................................... 135


NEW POLITICS, NEW PLACES: THE ITALIAN CRISIS OVER AND BEYOND THE 1990s ................................................................. 136
THE LEGAL, SPATIAL AND IMAGINATIVE RECOMPOSITION OF QUARTO OGGIARO 1997-2008 ................................................................. 143
TOWARDS THE EXPO: A NEW CENTRALITY FOR THE GRONDA ........................................................................................................ 148
SUMMARY......................................................................................................................................................................................... 155

CHAPTER 9: ETHNOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION AT THE CROSSROAD: WALKING THE SCALE OF THE CONSTRUCTION SITE ........................................................................................................................................................................ 156

WALKING WITH GUIDO: CONTRASTING VISIONS AND SCALES OF PLACE .................................................................................................... 156
FUNCTIONS AND SCALES: VISIONING AND SENSING THE CONTESTATION .......................................................................................... 160
PROJECTING THE GRONDA BEYOND THE ROAD ........................................................................................................................................ 165
WAITING FOR THE FUTURE: FENCING DEVELOPMENT ....................................................................................................................... 172
SUMMARY......................................................................................................................................................................................... 179

CHAPTER 10: ELECTORAL PRESENCE, HOUSING PROPERTY AND THE COMPOSITION OF PLACE ............ 180

EXPANDING POLITICS: ELECTIONS, PROTESTS AND URBAN STRATEGIES ACROSS PLACES ........................................................................ 180
MEETINGS OF POLITICAL PRESENCE: THE COMPOSITION OF PLACE THROUGH PRE-ELECTORAL EFFECTS ......................................................... 183
ENCOUNTERING, VISITING AND DOCUMENTING A PROPERTY .................................................................................................................. 190
ASSEMBLING THE TENANTS: UNIONS, DIVISIONS AND AFFILIATIONS ................................................................................................. 199
FROM THE TOWER TO THE SQUARE: ENCOUNTERING PROTEST POLITICS ......................................................................................... 202
SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 212

CHAPTER 11: DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING THE PLAN: THE PERSONAL PLACE OF ACTIVISM AND POLITICS .. 214

DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD ........................................................................................................................................... 214
CONTESTING THE Gronda: WITHIN AND BEYOND EXPERT KNOWING .................................................................................................... 228
SUMMARY ............................................................................................................................................................................................................... 230

CONCLUSION: .................................................................................................................................................................................................. 232

BETWEEN PLANNING AND POLITICS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PLACES REVISITED ................................................................................................. 232
PROVIDING A CONTEXT TO THEORY: PLACE AND ENGAGEMENTS BEYOND ETHNOGRAPHY .................................................................................. 233
ENHANCING ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES ............................................................................................................. 235
REIMAGINING THE CONTEXT OF POLITICS AS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVENTION ................................................................................ 237
DISCUSSING ACTIVIST PERSPECTIVES AS PART OF MULTIPLE ONTOLOGICAL WORLDS.............................................................................. 238

BIBLIOGRAPHY: ..................................................................................................................................................................................................... 240
Table of Figures

Figure 4.1: Map of the Highways and the *tangenziali* within the Province of Milan and Monza........61
Figure 4.2: The view from my window........................................................................................................68
Figure 4.3: My initial fieldwork house in Via Concilio Vaticano II, view from the garden.....................69
Figure 4.4: My initial fieldwork house in Via Concilio Vaticano II, detail..................................................69
Figure 4.5: My initial fieldwork house in Via Concilio Vaticano II, view from the construction site.....70
Figure 6.1: the Albertini plan......................................................................................................................100
Figure 6.2 Map of the Municipality of Musocco in 1850..............................................................................101
Figure 6.3: Map of the Municipality of Musocco in 1915..........................................................................101
Figure 6.4: The housing plans for Vialba and Quarto Oggiaro.................................................................106
Figure 6.5: Milan’s 1953 PRG.....................................................................................................................107
Figure 6.6: Detail of the Gronda, north Trajectory from the 1953 PRG.......................................................108
Figure 7.1: Cesare Snelli in his house........................................................................................................116
Figure 7.2: *Quarto Rosso* group picture in front of their headquarters in Via Concilio Vaticano........117
Figure 7.3: Circolo Giovanile in Via Vittani..............................................................................................124
Figure 7.4: Circolo Giovanile in Via Vittani..............................................................................................124
Figure 7.5: Outside the Circolo Giovanile in Via Vittani............................................................................125
Figure 7.6: Demonstration in Quarto Oggiaro...........................................................................................125
Figure 7.7: Demonstration in Quarto Oggiaro...........................................................................................126
Figure 7.8: Demonstration in Quarto Oggiaro...........................................................................................126
Figure 7.9: Cesare interviewed in Piazza Capuana in preparation of his archive exhibition............130
Figure 7.10: Protests at the local supermarkets.........................................................................................131
Figure 7.11: *Mercatino Rosso* in Piazza Capuana...............................................................................132
Figure 7.12: Interviewing Cesare Snelli in Piazza Capuana.................................................................134
Figure 7.13: *Quarto Rosso*’s shop...........................................................................................................135
Figure 7.14: A moment from the Student Movement Festival in Piazza Capuana..............................136
Figure 7.15: *Quarto Rosso*’s exhibition opening.................................................................................139
Figure 7.16: *Quarto Rosso*’s exhibition opening.................................................................................139
Figure 7.17: *Quarto Rosso*’s exhibition opening.................................................................................140
Figure 7.18: *Quarto Rosso’s* exhibition opening.........................................................140
Figure 8.1: Map of the *Euromilano’s Certosa project*..............................................150
Figure 8.2: Aerial view of the project........................................................................155
Figure 8.3: Detailed birds-eye view (west side)............................................................156
Figure 8.4: Detailed birds-eye view (east side).............................................................156
Figure 9.1: Guido at the intersection between Via Eritrea and the *Gronda* construction site........166
Figure 9.2: The construction site from Via Eritrea........................................................169
Figure 9.3: The construction site from Via Eritrea. On the left the housing estate in Via De Pisis, on the right the new area built by *Euromilano*.................................................................169
Figure 9.4: The hill and the *Euromilano* estate.............................................................170
Figure 9.5: A map of the new play-area in the park......................................................172
Figure 9.6: Broken fences dividing the park to the construction site.........................173
Figure 9.7: A natural path that from the park lead across the construction site............174
Figure 9.8: A natural path leading back to the road outside the construction site...........175
Figure 9.9: The temporary roundabout.........................................................................176
Figure 9.10: Via Castellammare, a temporary road sign............................................177
Figure 9.11: Fences closing the access to the new road.................................................177
Figure 9.12: Via Castellammare, temporary sign.........................................................178
Figure 9.13: Old farm house in Porretta Street.............................................................181
Figure 9.14: Renewed farm house in Porretta Street....................................................182
Figure 9.15: Old farm house in Porretta Street.............................................................183
Figure 9.16: Old farm house in Porretta Street.............................................................183
Figure 9.17: The construction site in the new Porretta Street........................................185
Figure 9.18: The construction site in the new Porretta Street........................................185
Figure 9.19: Area to be redeveloped in Via Porretta....................................................186
Figure 9.20: Area to be redeveloped in Via Porretta....................................................186
Figure 10.1: Slide1 from SEL presentation.................................................................195
Figure 10.2: Slide2 from SEL presentation.................................................................195
Figure 10.3: Slide3 from SEL presentation.................................................................196
Figure 10.4: A view of the Towers from the outside ................................................................. 200
Figure 10.5: Interviewing one resident outside the towers ..................................................... 201
Figure 10.6: Graffiti in the car park area of the Lessona Towers ............................................. 201
Figure 10.7: Underground car park ......................................................................................... 202
Figure 19.8: Graffiti in the car park area of the Lessona Towers ............................................. 202
Figure 10.9: Recent external paint falling down due to humidity .............................................. 203
Figure 10.10: Visiting the towers concierge ............................................................................. 204
Figure 10.11: Visiting a home in the tower ............................................................................. 205
Figure 10.12: Protesters from the Lessona Towers in Piazza Capuana during the opening celebration .................................................................................................................. 214
Figure 10.13: Protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of the local PD branch window ....................... 215
Figure 10.14: Local police observing the removal of the fences from Piazza Capuana before the official reopening .................................................................................................. 216
Figure 10.15: Detail of the politician addressing the crowd ...................................................... 217
Figure 10.16: The director of ACLI Lombardia introducing the project for Piazza Capuana ......... 218
Figure 10.17: Protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of the placards ................................................ 219
Figure 10.18: The protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of a photographer documenting the protest ...... 220
Figure 10.19: The protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of a photographer documenting the estate .... 221
Figure 10.20: New benches and structures in Piazzetta Capuana ............................................. 222
Figure 10.21: The protest in Piazza Capuana, the politician visiting the internal garden of the social housing estates in Piazza Capuana with local activists ........................................................................ 223
Figure 11.1: Members of the Simoni Park Committee during a day of protest with a banner ........ 239
Figure 11.2: A committee member collecting residents’ signatures for a petition to save Simoni Park ........................................................................................................................................ 240
Figure 11.3: A view of the fenced part of the park, already excavated for making space to the Gronda Nord construction site ........................................................................................................ 241
Figure 11.4: A detail of some stones, allegedly composed of asbestos, collected in the construction site .................................................................................................................................. 241
List of Abbreviations:

ACLI (Associazione Cristiani Lavoratori Italiani) Christian Association of Italian Workers
ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia) National Association of the Italian Partisans
ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana) Italian Cultural and Recreational Association
CE (Certosa Euromilano)
CIAM (Congres Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne)
EXPO (World Expo Fair)
FI (Forza Italia)
GN (Gronda Nord)
ICPM (Istituto per le case popolari a Milano)
INA (Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni)
LN (Lega Nord) Northern League
MS (Movimento Studentesco) Student Movement
PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano) Italian Communist Party
PD (Partito Democratico) Democratic Party
PDL (Partito delle Libertà) Party of Freedoms
PGT (Piano Generale Territoriale) General City Plan
PGTU (Piano Generale Traffico Urbano) General City Traffic Plan
PRC (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista) Communist Refoundation Party
PRU (Progetto di Riqualificazione Urbana) Urban Regeneration Project
PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano) Italian Socialist Part
SEL (Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà) Left, Ecology and Freedom Party
SIN (Strada Interquartiere Nord)
Introduction

This research aims to show how theories of place can provide a matrix for understanding the multiple compositions of planning controversies and how these enable us to trace the contribution of social movements and planning practices in the composition of place. My thesis argues that planning controversies bring together multiple scales, forms of engagement and imagination. Activist groups, even when they consider themselves purely in local terms, are in fact involved in the act of engaging institutions whose reach transcends locality and who are capable of shifting the lines between the realms of planning and politics. Within a controversy, activist practices can be traced down to both their own experiences, as well as to collective and broader issues, regarding the essence of dwelling in a city, neighbourhood or town. All such experiences always exist beyond one locality and one moment, and can only be grasped by trying to condense and bring together multiple and complex forms of engagement in order to ultimately define what a planning controversy is. By focusing on Milan, I trace how the impact of modernity and its tensions can be positioned within the Italian socio-political context and how the planning of large social housing neighbourhood cannot be dissociated from the experiences of those living them. Concentrating on the historical development of the Milanese periferia, and its transformation over the following decades up until the present day, I discuss how this area of the city can be studied to revisit the socio-historical trajectory of Milanese modern planning.

Following the above approach, in my thesis I have included the discussion of experiences and practices of how planning processes are interpreted and consequently inhabited by people, either simply residents or active contestants of planning procedures. I have particularly focused on the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro in order to cover and connect different planning controversies, as well as socio-political configurations and divisions that are central to the unfolding of knowledge practices and forms of inhabiting the periferia. In so doing, my empirical research provides a focus on the lives of those who were contesting plans and policies of urban transformation more than the plans and the planners themselves. This particular approach enabled me to unfold the alternative
nature of non-institutionalised knowledge about the city, the neighbourhood and ultimately that which constitutes the Milanese *periferia*. My thesis establishes practical and theoretical contributions to how planning controversies can be conceptualised anthropologically through ethnographic, historical and archival research. By negotiating our engagement in the field, we are learning how other practices of knowing coexist and relate to each other to unfold and trace the interplay between urban transformations, planning conflicts, activism and political controversies. When a group of citizens decide to organise forms of protestation against a plan or a project, we can observe and take part in a process of production and counter-production of authority and evidence. In these contexts, the concept of who has the right to do what and where is central for politically and socially positioning different subjects in relation to the existing forms of power that control the making and unmaking of places. Planning institutions, political authorities and neighbourhood committees contribute to the constitution of places in ways more extensive than the local realm of urban politics. This thesis recognizes that different ways of knowing are produced through practices of planning, politics, activism and advocacy. Thus it is important that we acknowledge that contrasting logics can be traced and identified as informing and developing through a controversy. These different forms of knowing do not necessarily arise without clashing, and indeed it is within those situations of controversy that I argue that multiple logics can be traced. Opposing narratives of historical and temporal transformation are produced by the social environments in which we research and collaboratively contribute.

This thesis develops a discussion around the composition of place to build a structured debate on what constitutes localities and the relationships which connect them with the rest of the city and the world. I consider place as a geographical interpretation beyond locality. At civic, national and international levels, ideological concepts are employed which in turn become institutional decisions that impact upon, and radically transform, the ways in which we live, inhabit and dwell. The composition of reactions to these events transcend geographical position, often resulting in an altering of interpersonal relationships and the evolution of processes, such as planning controversies, political divisions and how residents themselves identify with areas. Place, therefore exists on a level which is more than just local, and yet it remains local at the same time. Place itself
embodies the past, present and future. The impact of planning is a good example of this particular interpretation, because planning is a temporal activity. When planning is proposed, it is done in the present governance’s anticipation of the future, as the result of decisions which were often taken in the past. Ultimately, it is within the construction of these spatial and temporal connections that the most important and creative transformations of cities, towns and neighbourhoods as places are produced, intensified and established. Place is also an imagination, it is something which is not yet there, it can be something unwanted, which becomes a contestation of imagination in contrast with another. If we use such a theoretical understanding of place, urban planning controversies can be reinterpreted as compositions of contrasting experiences and forms of imaginations, which result in practices defining what place is.

Planning controversies are often seen as specifically-localised social movements, incurring a limited impact, for they are usually concerned with a single issue. However I propose that despite activist groups framing their actions in local terms, in actuality their activism engages institutional actors in ways which are more than just local. Their activism is always beyond one locality and one moment. Activist practices can be expanded to understand collective and broader issues, regarding the nature of citizenship, democracy and the experience of dwelling in a city, neighbourhood or town. Therefore the meaning of this kind of activism can only be grasped by trying to interweave multiple and complex forms of engagement which conclusively define what a planning controversy is. If understood in this way, planning controversies are crucial in readdressing anthropological ways of knowing and understanding. They act as an extension of fixed governance procedures and bureaucratic practices, and bring forward visions, and other ways of acting, dwelling and being, that can ultimately be discussed as multi-ontological worlds.

Planning controversies open up spaces where contrasting visions are constantly produced and reimagined. This is exemplified by the protests by local residents I discuss in my thesis (especially in chapters 9, 10 and 11) in opposition to planning initiatives and operations promoted by multiple local institutions. Ontological differences can thus be recognised and addressed within a controversy as part of the redefinition of urban places. In these contexts the anthropology of place I am proposing expands and further defines
the ways in which modernity, planning and governance are produced, contested and alternatively composed by activists, residents and inhabitants.

Outline of the thesis

In the first chapter I outline different approaches in the development of theories of place within anthropological literature and advance my own framework for contributing to the understanding of planning controversies. Discussing the limits of Augé’s concept of non-places I propose to expand his conception of anthropological places through a relational approach. I connect the idea of anthropological places with phenomenological theories, but in opposition to Ingold’s (2000, 2011) approach, I argue for the necessity to adopt an understanding of their political nature and constitution. In the second chapter I re-address how theories of place are adopted and developed as part of what we discuss as an urban planning controversy. Taking a unified approach to how social movements and planning practices are understood, I discuss how theories of place can offer a framework for clarifying the shifting role of politics in the redefinition of place. Social movements are thus more fully realised as being ultimately composed of shifts in the geographical and imaginative scales, a process through which both planning and political controversies unfolds. In this way the myriad existences and forms of being that we research and write about as anthropologists amplifies the realm of protests and contestations beyond the limits of existing categories while still engaging with those of our interlocutors in the field.

In the third chapter I address the methodology and ways of knowing produced throughout anthropology as a process of experiencing, documenting and writing reflexively and collaboratively with our informants in the field. This is a process of building relationships with those we live and research alongside, aiming to learn how they deal with a set of conditions, tensions and complexities. In my work I have adopted such an approach by including practices of walking, taking pictures and discussing my research with interlocutors to ascertain how we collectively experience forms of protests, contestations and activism as part of the social life of a neighbourhood. With this in mind, I have
incorporated autobiographical and reflexive approaches within the concept of anthropological places to rethink the relations and the creative intervention of the researcher in the field. The experiences I have constructed are then used to reconsider place as an encounter between individuals, groups, set of practices, and ideas about locality and further afield. Following the above approach, my understanding of anthropological methodology is one which includes, but is not bounded by, ethnographic engagement, but includes historical and archival research. The way Milan is discussed within academic and non-academic fields of urban planning, social movements and urban histories thus constitute relevant perspectives to be explored through an anthropological approach. In Chapter 4, describing how the field can be alternatively conceptualised in relation to processes of emplacement, I explore practices of arrival, residence and dwelling in the field. Those practices are central for constituting anthropological knowledge as a process of movement through places that is expanded beyond traditional ethnographic methods. This construction of the field allows the thesis to bring in a multi-disciplinary approach to discuss ideas of modernity, bureaucracy and politics as historical processes. In the extreme outskirts of Milan, in the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro, I have established a context for observing and reflecting on the transformations and challenges of the Italian periferia, outskirts of the city. By following the unfolding of planning controversies in this neighbourhood and beyond, I have learned to appreciate the multiple and oft-contested scales of place as an important element for producing anthropological knowledge. Within situations of controversy, two or more understandings are presented as radically and irreducibly different, posing a challenge to how we can negotiate place without taking into consideration its political configuration. This is particularly true when we think of how the conflicts emerging from a neighbourhood or a city contribute to shaping broader tensions in the relationships of power and control which define modern societies.

In the course of Chapter 5, the issue of planning controversies in the periferia is presented as key to unfolding the meaning of place in Milan. Literatures ranging from anthropology, social movements and planning histories are presented as a link between empirical and theoretical material, showing the necessity to look more closely at the interplay between planning and urban contentions. I argue that an understanding of the social and political
tensions arising from controversies is central to reimagining the city and its constituent parts. I also claim that a discussion of these issues will provide a useful account of how planning and activism can be conceptualised in the making of cities and towns beyond the Italian context. This is then developed within a historical framework in Chapter 6, where I show how the Milanese *periferia* had been constantly contested and renegotiated in the course of the 20th Century, together with changes brought about by traditional politics and new forms of social movements. In particular, I argue how processes of urban governance, land use transformations and local politics propose to define and establish fixed, shared and accepted ways of inhabiting the city. Within those narratives and logics, planning controversies and contestations juxtapose different forms of imagination, ways of knowing and dwelling. Chapter 7 provides a retrospective review of social movement practices that emerged in the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro in the period between 1974 and 1979. In order to make the stories and experiences of this period’s activists more meaningful in the contemporary context, I explored the imaginative power of a photographic archive I have encountered in the course of my fieldwork together with a group of activists in the neighbourhood. Revisiting the history of a local group belonging to the Milanese *Movimento Studentesco*, I discuss how an archive can foster a series of connections between people and histories which are rooted in memories and forms of imagination.

Drawing on enduring experiences of contestation in Quarto Oggiaro against the *Gronda Nord*, in Chapter 8 I discuss the narrative of urban change in Milan between 1990 and 2010. In this period I argue that shifts in the definition and delimitation of planning and political power were produced, resulting in differing ideologies of what constitutes a city. The *Gronda Nord* emerges from these contrastive forms of imaginations as a shifting and ever changing set of political and planning initiatives, attracting contestations all along its trajectory. In Chapter 9 presenting the experience of an ethnographic walk with a Quarto Oggiaro resident opposed to the road infrastructure project I contribute to creating an understanding of the impacts of the *Gronda Nord* controversy, arguing that practices of imagination produced along the site engage and contrast the future with the present of the construction site. There the materiality of the construction site and its composition brings together a series of contrasting vistas capable of reversing the rhetoric of the
project. Reflecting on the events shaping the political sphere during my fieldwork and beyond, in Chapter 10 I propose to assume the concept of place that is attached to, and emerges from, our relationships with research subjects, and the multiple audiences of our research. There I tackle the ethical grounds and disposition of collaboration in the case of a controversy over the property of social housing in Quarto Oggiaro. Discussing the case of a group of residents in a social housing block, I reflect on how the power of the authorities to displace those that cannot afford to buy a house ultimately defines the crisis of politics and planning in Milan as well as city governance and civic transformation. Following the protests from a group of Quarto Oggiaro residents, I offer a view from different situations where we can consider afresh the relationships between inhabitants and institutions. Producing a series of collaborative writings and through visual and photographic documentations I show how ultimately inhabitants of the periferia and the planners of their lives seem to operate on different scales. In the following chapter (11) I return to the controversy of the Gronda Nord and explore the spatial divisions it articulated within the neighbourhood and how those can be adopted as a productive site for the reconfiguration of Milanese politics. Multiple aspects of the neighbourhood are defined as elements of a new articulation of Milanese development where contrasting ideas about the future of the periferia are produced as part of the transformation of its residential and infrastructural connections.

My conclusions present how the question of place can be addressed beyond predetermined limits between politics and planning and how those are shifted through controversies and protests. In this context, a focus on the dynamics and relationships of collaboration and comparison within practices of contention offers a suitable path to readdress the understanding of planning and social movements.
Chapter 1: Thinking place at the intersection with politics

In this chapter, I explore the merits of a theoretical discussion of place for anthropological research and propose a framework for studying the engagement of people with not just their locality, but the multiplicity of conditions and scales that inhabit their environment. I argue that if we aim to address the ambiguities connected with the configuration of place, we need to focus on the theoretical grounding of spatial imaginaries and expand our understanding of place from a phenomenological to a relational approach. This chapter also consists of a proposal to re-engage the definition of place within the realm of politics. Adopting a paradigm of place as open and continually contested requires a reconsideration of the political nature of the experiences we encounter and create while conducting research.

Multiple paradigms for the anthropology of place

During the 1990s several theories of space, place, landscape and locality were produced and drawn into the anthropological debate (Ingold 1994; Feld and Basso 1996; Augé 1995, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997; Appadurai 1996; Bender and Winer 2001; Hirsh and O’Hanlon, 1995). Thinking about the conditions and the definitions of what makes places relevant for producing and conducting anthropological research opened up the theoretical and epistemological orientation of the discipline. Original approaches emerging from this debate shared a position towards a more coherent use of spatial concepts, as well as a general shift in the way anthropological research is conducted. In this context, new spatial imaginaries to reconstruct anthropological practice beyond the classical anthropological locations of the village, the remote area and eventually the urban neighbourhood, were envisaged. The idea of multi-site fieldwork in particular was set as a methodological and epistemological adjustment broadening the scale of ethnographic engagement towards global and transnational phenomena (Marcus, 1995; Gupta and
Ferguson, 1992, 1997; Hannertz, 2003). The evaluation of these propositions opened a debate on the artificial and reflexive nature of fieldwork (Amit, 2000; Hannertz 2003, Coleman and Collins 2006; Falzon 2009) and produced a reconsideration of anthropological ways of knowing (Strathern 1991; Ingold 2000, 2012; Englund and Leach 2000; Harris 2004; Candea, 2002, 2010). Although this thesis does not discuss the merits or the limits of multi-sited fieldwork, I acknowledge that those critiques contribute to readdressing anthropology’s epistemologies within a spatial framework. It is along this path that this chapter aims to illustrate different approaches to the anthropology of place and how they can be adopted to re-address the way we think and the way political practices can be conducted. In addition, and with specific reference to the aims of this research, the concept of place is central for redefining the scope of anthropological engagement, that is contextual and situated, where a contested sense of what makes our environment significant in terms of different ways of dwelling, inhabiting and living together. This is particularly relevant since, as researchers, we find ourselves entangled in a context where multiple visions and imaginations of place are used and adopted to justify, promote and contest the ways the future is implemented, while the past is discussed among a particular locality as well as broadly within an intellectual and political landscape. This chapter addresses those issues and aims to offer a discussion of what kind of definitions and usages can afford a more multi-situated understanding of place.

An early contribution to the study of place in anthropology during the 1990s emerged from debate over the global and transnational transformation of cities and towns. Here, a resurrection of interest in the sphere of everyday life, and in practices of human relations, could be ascribed to de Certeau’s (1984) theoretical influence. It is following this line of theoretical work that Augé (1995, 2000) adopted and further developed the concept of anthropological place as “a space where identities, relationships and a story can be made out” (Augé, 2000, p. 8) and the idea of non-places as linked with the emergence of the condition of “supermodernity”. According to Augé, non-places refer to “spaces of circulation, consumption and communication” (1995: viii). Airports as well as supermarkets and railway stations fall under the condition of contemporary non-places to be transcended, but not inhabited. Although Augé emphasises that a non-place is always defined relationally, his assumption of discontinuity between places and non-places is
problematic if we wish to understand the ambiguity and multiplicity of places (Merriman 2004, Ingold and Vergunst, 2008, Pink 2012). For this reason, if we seek to engage with the various conditions and outcomes of locality that anthropologists encounter in the field, we need to move our attention from the idea of non-place towards a more open and non-dualistic definition. Borrowing Augé’s category of anthropological place in this thesis I have broadened this definition to include both the local and non-local elements configuring space and modernity. This re-articulation of the concept of anthropological place thus requires a further examination of theoretical works which explore both the experiential and relational sphere of place.

A phenomenological approach in the anthropology of place emerged with an interest in the way people dwell and make themselves at home. Following this approach, anthropologists called for a more focused interest in what people make of place (Feld and Basso, 1996). The idea of the primacy of perception in the constitution of space (Casey, 1996, p.18) and the concept of sense of place encapsulates and unfolds the sensuous entanglement of inhabited and everyday landscapes (Field and Basso, 1996; Hirsh and O’Hanlon 1995; Bender and Winer, 2001). It is within this framework that the concept of dwelling had been proposed to address the sensorial experience of places that compose and shape the local construction of the world (Field and Basso, 1996). Central to this approach is the understanding of place as resounding through environments and lived perceptual experience (Field and Basso, 1996). In contrast with Augé’s approach, here place is not viewed as derivative of or opposed to a prior abstract idea of space or non-place, but as a universal element. This advances an understanding of place as a result of relational practices, and clearly positions the senses as an element for rethinking human relationships with nature, environment and landscape. The limits of this paradigm sit in the way the tensions and the disruptions emerging from broader processes of transformation and global changes within places are explained. Ultimately this phenomenology proposes an attentive engagement with the spatial articulation and sensory embodiment of everyday life but remains attached to the idea that sense of place is centred on and predicated as a local experience. If human experience is “ineluctably place-bound” (p.19) as this phenomenological approach argued, then the risk is to develop what Massey (2005) has called a parochial and localised vision of place.
A second phenomenological approach based on the idea of movement and interaction with the environment helped shaped an original approach to place. Thinking of place as “a nexus of on-going life activity” instead of “a bounded portion of the territory” (Ingold, 2005, p.506) is central in avoiding any dualism between place and space, or between places and non-places. From this approach, place can be unfolded as part of a process that occurs through a disorderly configuration of practices and direct engagement with the environment (Ingold, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2011, 2013).\footnote{I refer here to the essays “The temporality of the landscape” (1993) and “Building, dwelling, living: how animals and people make themself at home in the world” (1995) then collected in the publication “The perception of the environment. Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill” (2000). Later developments of Ingold’s work initially published separately have been collected in: “Being alive. Essays on movement, knowledge and description” (2011) and “Making Anthropology, archeology and architecture” (2013).} Broadening the phenomenological spectrum of Casey (1996), Feld and Basso (1996), Ingold advanced the positioning of place in relation to an ontological process of making worlds. The concept of ‘taskscape’ describes this process as a “pattern of dwelling activities” (1993, p.154) - a heterogeneous entanglement of practices, movements and perceptions that can also be described by the idea of inhabiting (Ingold, 2012). Another useful aspect of Ingold’s understanding of place rests in its interconnectedness with broader historical transformations, modes of production and theoretical shifts within western scientific thinking. It is from this specific argument that Ingold’s idea of place starts to differ from the previous phenomenological framework adopted by Casey (1996), Feld and Basso (1996).

Strongly based on the opposition between the process of dwelling and the logic of modern scientific knowledge, Ingold’s framework posited a universalistic drive that he called “the logic of inversion” (Ingold, 2011, p.68). This logic, is the basis for a conceptual contrast between ideas of building and dwelling that Ingold explored across a series of publications (1993, 2000, 2006, 2011). While the building perspective assumes that “worlds are made before they are lived in” (1995 -2000-, p.179), the “dwelling perspective” suggests that “forms [and] people... arise ... in the specific relational context of their practical engagement with their surroundings” (1995-2000, p.187). The logic of inversion, Ingold claims, acts as a replacement of direct engagement with the environment through a set of given cognitive rules. Thus it is connected with the building perspective and is identified
as a limit for a fully relational understanding of being in the world. Identifying modernism and western thinking with the logic of inversion, Ingold opposes this logic to the open multiplicity arising from the dwelling perspective, as an “historical” process and “forever coming into being” (224). As a result of this historical and ontological vision, for Ingold, citing Wolf (1982), Euro-American history is made of “numerous and often conflicting claims” (2005, p.502) with different visions of the future, of society and of human needs and desires. Ingold’s approach has provided a viable advancement towards a relational ontology of place, and while making this contribution his approach had been criticised for excluding politics from his analysis of modernity that focused on modern rationality but not as much on the modern state (Uchiyamada, 2004, p.723).

Ingold’s vision for anthropology claims to challenge the hegemony of the alienating discourse of modernity and western thought (Ingold, 1993, p.230). This latter relational ontology espoused by Ingold includes the idea of the necessity of revision and reconfiguration of modernist knowledge and broadens the discussion of place (and anthropological places) within a wider historical paradigm and a relational understanding of the ways the world is inhabited, performed and constituted. This, for Ingold, was the perspective which anthropologists should be pursuing as “real people, dwelling in the real world” (Ingold, 2000, p. 186). While Ingold’s theoretical work provides a useful redefinition of the concept of anthropological place, there are still elements of its relational framework that need to be addressed more specifically. Following Uchiyamada’s (2004) critique, it is problematic to understand how Ingold intends to make this reversion and how anthropologists should position their analytical understandings within a specific intellectual and political landscape. The relational ontology Ingold asks anthropologists to work within is based on the refusal to assume a pre-given configuration of place, landscape and environment and is linked to his refusal of the idea of universal reason as a fundamental perspective for anthropological knowledge. This framework results in an idealised and apolitical vision of place based on a categorical opposition between the dwelling perspective he attributes to egalitarian hunter-gatherer and the logic of inversion emerging from western world-views (Kenrick (2011, p.32). It is ultimately in relation to the understanding of the role of the political within the configuration of places that this chapter
aims to further compensate a relational ontology of place within a different way of unfolding modernity and its legacies for contemporary worlds.

Not scared of politics: the contingency of place and its ambiguities

In this subsection, I confront Ingold’s relational ontology (2006) with an understanding of how power and politics are articulated through places. In order to fully unfold the way places are entangled within broader and multiple contexts in which we are immersed, I expand my discussion towards an understating of place relation with politics. The lack of such understanding has been one of the main critiques of phenomenological approaches to place; one that even Ingold admitted to having missed (Ingold 2005, p.503). To close this theoretical gap I introduce the work of Doreen Massey (2005), and suggest how this can be adopted to rethink the political nature of places within a relational and ontological framework. Ingold’s approach significantly advanced the literature of the anthropology of place by investigating world-making experiences, practices of dwelling and inhabiting. In doing this, his position resembles one of geographer Massey who similarly called for an understanding of place as being a crucible of potentialities always in the making. Where those two approaches seem to differ is where I propose to compensate Ingold’s theories in the way in which place can account for the configuration of the political as part of the constitution of our environment. Ingold himself acknowledges the necessity to enrich his approach in order to understand the dynamics of power in human relationships (Ingold 2005, p.503). Massey (2005) provides a more direct definition of the political composition of places as a constant articulation within complex geometries of power. In particular I discuss how her theoretical approach can be compared with similar arguments developed by Ingold (1993, 1995, 2011) and I propose to compensate Ingold’s approach with an empirical understanding of the politics of place through an articulation of the concept of place at the point at which it intersects with politics.

Massey (2005) criticised Casey’s understanding of place (1993) adopted by Feld and Basso (1993) and partially followed by Ingold’s vision of dwelling (1993), for being “too
rooted” and “too little open to the externally relational” (Massey, 2005, p. 183). She developed instead the idea of place as necessarily open and always in process. This is something that places her perspective alongside Ingold’s approach where the temporal and the spatial elements of place are drawn together with sensory and material configurations. Similarly to Ingold, Massey (2005) provides a theoretical understanding of place aiming to rethink its relation with space across the history of western and non-western thought. Her understanding of place as a “spatio-temporal event” (p.130), reflects this broad aim of “spatialising the history of modernity” (p.62). This view is shared with Wolf’s (1982) ideas of modernity that influenced Ingold’s approach to the production of place. Massey (2004) adds the discussions of the political challenges and potentials offered by places as an articulation of “wider power-geometries of space” (Massey 2005 p.130-131). She argues that places are constituted through “webs of power-relations” and that we must challenge the ways whereby its resources are mobilised (p.102). It is exactly within the articulation of global and local dynamics that her concept of place is proposed as a useful tool for rethinking the ways politics is practiced, discussed and theorised. Her position here is not a mere defence of the local against the global, what she seeks instead is to “alter the very mechanisms of the global itself” (p.102). In this case, according to Massey, place is mutually constituted by global and local practices and take part in what she defines as “power-geometries” (p.101). At the same time, the specificity of place also implies that each articulation will offer different possibilities for intervention within these power-geometries. Understanding the articulations of these power geometries, Massey’s arguments are central for any serious “political position-taking”. Political positions can address questions of social power and give answers to particular questions emerging from place (p.166).

Massey’s contribution to understanding places sees them formed “through a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestations” (p.154). Place thus acts as a political potentiality enabling the opening up of conflictual processes of urban life as “potentially creative crucibles for the democratic sphere” (Massey 2005, p.153). It is within these constant negotiations of place that we can often see the eventuality “posing (political)
questions to our living together” (p.151).\(^2\) Urban protest, planning disputes and controversies can be positioned within a theoretical discussion of the political capacities of place. On the empirical level, Massey provides a series of explanations of the social, political and economic processes which comprise cities. These are considered as “peculiarly large, intense and heterogeneous constellations of trajectories, demanding of complex negotiation” (p. 155). There is likely to be a set of regulations that manage and organise social and spatial relations as well as a set of non-explicitly regulated practices. However, cities are not thought of as ontologically different from all other places that are made of “multiplicity, antagonism and contrasting temporalities” (p.159). In terms of London and the trajectories of financial capital, she further notes how these can be seen “in collision” with other trajectories “differently embedded within `globalization’” (pp.155-156). These collisions, she continues, “highlight a conflict which require a political stance” (p.157). The refusal to recognise this antagonism is a failure to address “an explicit conflict over political aims” (p.157). Describing a campaign for promoting a multicultural idea of integration adopted in the city of Hamburg, Massey refers to a political poster showing how geological as well as social space is formed through a series of negotiations. In the case she proposed, the political poster was an active agent. This poster, showing a rock which had moved across oceans before arriving in Hamburg, produced an imaginative work emerging from ideas of human and non-human correlation, co-implication and contingency. Ultimately this is a process of a recreation of the past “in order to provoke a re-imagination of the nature of the present” (2005 p.150). She calls this a mobilisation of a political cosmology. This is created not as a pre-existing configuration of ideas and things, but by its coming together as “part and parcel of the way in which we live and produce time-space” (p.150).

The revision of the phenomenological approach proposed by Massey is successful in showing the necessity of accounting for the way in which politics is involved within the constitution of places. Central to this understanding is the ideas of places as intrinsically political and as the result of negotiations between “wider power-geometries of space”

\(^2\) Referring to Derrida’s work and her focus of (spatial) politics, ordered chaos, and also “how [a] juxtaposition can be regulated” (p.151). In this way she poses politics as formed on a conflictual ground where “stability is not natural, essential or substantial” (Derrida 1996, cited in Massey 2005, p. 151).
In this thesis I adopt this framework in conjunction with Ingold’s relational ontology to rethink the anthropology of place. In order to fully integrate Massey’s ideas of politics and power within this framework, in the next section I expand on the challenges of this proposition and I develop an understanding of politics that is capable to contribute to more than phenomenological ideas of place.

The shifting place of the political and its imagination

Positioning politics in relation to the anthropology of place is a central element for constructing a theoretical framework able to tackle the multiplicity of partial and contrasting perspectives informing the constitution of places. Political anthropology and the anthropology of place can thus be usefully brought together if we want to understand the political nature of places and the placed nature of politics. Reviewing the limits of political anthropology between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s Spencer (1997) acknowledges the lack of attention paid to the institutional context, in favour of a description of politics outside its more institutional fields and within everyday life. Following an understanding of power and politics as expanded to the realms of everyday life, political anthropology had started to see politics beyond the original intention or experiences of the people involved in those phenomena. This has created a series of theoretical and epistemological limits for the project of political anthropology for Spencer. In opposition to this expansion of the political, Spencer claims that anthropology needs to position the political beyond its analytical understanding. Spencer proposes an understanding of political imagination as the field responding to the different ways in which people identify and react to the area of life and the practices they themselves refer to as “the political”. Therefore the political is best viewed in context and continuously redefined by particular events that modify the boundaries between the political and non-political. In this sense, such a political anthropology should not have a predetermined theoretical definition of what “the political” is, as well as where it is to be found and what can be defined as such. Instead a more open approach can provide our fieldwork with the quality of “empirical unpredictability” (Spencer, 1997, p. 9). It is through this condition that
we can thus aim at “tracking the `political’” through the different contexts in which this takes place. I have shown this in more detail in Chapter 9 of this thesis; during my fieldwork an administrative election in Milan expanded the realm of the political to the discussion of urban planning capacities. A series of arenas for the discussion and imagination of the political within everyday life were thus reproduced through planning controversies as well as other disputes around other critical areas and themes such as public housing ownership and dwelling, youth participation in civic life and the production of creative culture in the suburbs. 3

Anthropologists have become “suspicious” of any non-political spaces in the context where they research (Spencer, 1997; Candea, 2011). Candea developed Spencer’s argument by proposing that anthropologists need to attend the continuing effects in people’s everyday lives of the state and of the production of state-society boundaries and thus “attending the ways in which a boundary between the political and the non-political can actually be realized” (p.312). This is an important argument that will help link the theoretical development of my work with its empirical and ethnographic context. Affording ethnographic depth to the categories adopted and shaped by my interlocutors in the field, my understanding of places as mutually constituted does not analytically assume the limits and the extensions of what politics, planning and activism mean. Drawing from Spencer (1997) and Candea (2011), I propose understanding the distinction between the political and non-political as one which emerges from ethnographic categories and is not analytical and pre-given. This will bring in the visions and perspectives proposed by my interlocutors in the field as already meaningful for understanding the experience of place. The aim of this thesis is not to necessarily re-politicise those sentiments or to explain them as part of a broader phenomenon that escapes my informants’ perceptions. Instead it is claimed that only when taking those claims seriously and suspending judgment over their rationality or justifiability can we connect with the way a controversy affects the composition of one’s place. Following this proposition, I argue that the category of the

---

3 Referring to his own fieldwork in Sri Lanka, Spencer (1997) provides an example of this phenomena showing how during elections the domain of the `political’ “had expanded and stepped into surprising areas of life” (p.8). Here, “the institutional structure of […] politics – elections, parties, political arguments in newspapers” becomes the site for more than just “instrumental action” (p.8).
political should be included within a relational understanding of anthropological places. Consequently, understanding place anthropologically shall be considered, not only as a result of an empirical engagement with the people in the field, but also as a way of giving weight to their capacity of making the world they inhabit. In this way, instead of assuming politics as an analytical and separate category, it can be seen as a constituent of place remaining open to what Spencer calls “empirical unpredictability” (1997, p.9). This is ultimately how we can create a different relation between place and politics, by tracing the boundaries of what define politics and expanding the definition of place to include its multiple relationships with power.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed different anthropological theories of place emerging from the early and mid-1990s. I questioned the limits of relational theories of place as formulated in the idea of anthropological place (Augé, 2000) and that of taskscape (Ingold, 1993, 2009, 2012). I suggest that both concepts ignore the inherently political nature of places that is expressed by phenomena such as urban planning contestations and social movements. A political anthropology of place, is proposed instead as a way to trace the changing boundaries of politics in the field. Politics informs the constitution of places in ways that strictly relational approaches often fail to address. Knowing that people and places are connected thought multiple spatial and temporal trajectories leave open the problem of assessing how one connection is different from the other, stronger or more successful. This is why the concept of scale is useful to expand the idea of anthropological place. This approach informs my discussion of emplaced research (Chapter 3) as well as that of urban planning and social movements (Chapter 2). In the historical and ethnographic chapters of my thesis I expand this conception of place discussing planning contestations and neighbourhood activism in Milan’s *periferia* (chapters 6, 8 and 9).
Chapter 2: Engaging movements, trajectories and controversies: anthropology with places of planning contestations

In this chapter, I discuss the relevance of urban places for the anthropology of planning and social movements. Practices of planning, bureaucracy and urban politics are proposed to understand the way urban places disclose the tensions of modernity and the ambiguities of national states. I intend to examine planning practices and social movements to further articulate those logics and how they contribute to the composition of urban places. In particular, I argue that a relational understanding of place offer a better paradigm for linking social movement practices, not just with specific locales, but with the broader elements constituting modern states, planning regimes and Western ideas of planning.

From urban anthropology to planning regimes: urban places and practices of modernity

In the early 1990s, propositions for a renewed anthropological practice questioned classical fieldwork locations, objects and aims (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). A number of renewed challenges to classical approaches in anthropology, its traditional objects of study and the location of fieldwork (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, 1997, Marcus, 1995) facilitated new attention to the spatial, social and economic constitution of the city and its representations (Low, 1996), creating a new centrality and a subsequent resurgence of urban anthropology 4.

4 However, not all of the national anthropologies seem to have reframed their research focus at the same speed. While the field of urban anthropology in the US can be dated back to the 1920s and 1930s, Kertzer (1997), referring to his own research area of urban Italy, lamented that urban settings had been under studied, if not completely ignored. At least until the mid-1990s, the majority of American anthropologists working in the country were based, not in mainland Italy, but on Sicily and Sardinia, two of its main islands (1997, p.75). A delay in the diffusion of theories of place can be understood in connection with this delay in the renovation of anthropology’s objects of study (Signorelli, 1996). For a more extensive discussion of the development of the anthropology of Italy see chapter 5 of this work.
Following such an approach Low (2009) recognised the necessity to address the theorisation and conceptualisation of urban space as the result of socio-cultural interactions and proposed to review previous approaches to the anthropology of the city and urban anthropology within a renewed theoretical framework. Highlighting the conflicts and tensions of place, Low (2009) also provides evidentiary support for the necessity to provide an overarching framework for the understanding and disclosure of the mechanisms within capitalist economies which constantly reshape the environments in which we live. Low proposed thinking of places as “socially constructed” as well as “politicised” (p.22); similarly to some of my arguments which I raised in chapter 1, Low never shied away from confronting the political dimension of place, often omitted from phenomenological approaches. In this regard, Low considered urban places as “containers” for practices of resistance, counter-resistance and contestation where public processes of change (p.115) are permitted and generated. In her own fieldwork in Costa Rica, Low looked at plazas (1999) which she defined as privileged urban sites for grounding an understanding of social and environmental processes of transformation, and as public urban spaces where we can clearly observe intense linkages between the micro-scale of everyday life and the macro-scale of neoliberal capitalism (p.384).

By linking the aforementioned approaches emerging in the 1990s from the field of cultural and urban anthropology with more recent works developing within the anthropology of planning and the state, it is possible to advance the possibility of tackling the logic of modernity emerging within Western and European states. Looking at planning in the broader context of modern bureaucracy as a social phenomenon it is thus possible to think of planning practices, as well as the complaints against them, as part of a larger configuration and a wider “ideology and practice of accountability” (Herzfeld, 1992 p 3). It is indeed between the formal regulations and the day-to-day bureaucratic practices that by following Herzfeld we can contend that bureaucracy, and the stereotypical complaints about it, are “fully embedded in everyday values” (1992 p.18). Bridging Abram’s (2011) and Abram and Weszkalnys’ (2011) anthropology of planning with Massey’s (2005) and Ingold’s (2000, 2011) relational approaches to place, we can think of place as occurring in a continuous process of composition where human relations and modes of production are unfolded.
Planning discourses and practices can be seen as managing as well as making the world. This way of thinking considers the human mode of production as an element enclosed within a definable plan with a beginning and an end, similarly to what Ingold called “the building perspective” (Ingold 2000, p. 178). Abram and Weszkalnys (2011) in their understanding of planning propose a different angle from that of Ingold’s building perspective. Within this approach, the concepts of promise and anticipation play a central role. Promises are intrinsic to planning and they cannot be simply discredited as true or false, success or failure. What the plan actually does, they argue, is an act of anticipation. It is important to note that here anticipation provides a more specific description than Ingold’s inversion for speaking of planning initiatives. At the same time similarly to Ingold’s inversion, here, the performativity of promise acts as a challenge to, and also a closure of, the openness of places. Abram and Weszkalnys (2011) further explore the promise of planning as connected to relations of obligation and evacuation (p.11) that the plan is able to produce⁵. The relationship of obligation and evacuation can be understood as an “instrument of momentary action” able to evacuate the future by controlling the present (p.11). In this context, the anthropology of planning can contribute to understanding how architectural and social orders are connected. Ethnographic detail can ultimately show the relation of “plan to places, things to people” and uncover “different notions of temporality implicit in the promise that planning seems to offer” (p.4). By mobilising together, and in conjunction with, the concepts of temporality and performativity as well as of promise and anticipation, this approach offers a more nuanced interpretation of contemporary planning practices than Ingold’s logic of inversion between dwelling and building discussed in the previous chapter. Weszkalnys’ (2010) ethnography of unified Berlin urban transformations further explored how the logic of anticipation is better suited to discussion of the role of planning in the composition of place. Outlining a relational and place-based approach to understanding new plans for the city of Berlin post-unification, Weszkalnys assesses how urban places are “multiply constituted” (p.2) as a coming together, as an assemblage of discourses, practices and social forms (p.7). Looking at the central square, Alexanderplaz, her approach suggests that ethnographic

⁵ Abram and Weszkalnys refer this idea of planning as obligation and evacuation of the future to Baxstrom (2011).
analyses of place contestations can examine both people’s subjectivities of place and practices of place making as “embodied, particular, contextual and always enmeshed” (p.22). Thus, how can we think of planning controversies within this framework?

Protesters or objectors are not necessarily citizens who have lost faith in the planning system, but are often those with a stronger ambition for plans and a future that could be delivered if correctly proposed and constructed (Abram, 2011, p.22). Exposing the case of the non-rational role of the master plan in the context of a regeneration project in Sheffield, Abram (2011) argues that “planning is seen to change not only the place but the people in it” (p.30). This is briefly what she calls “the magic of planning”, or “a form of magic through which residents will be transformed into fully human beings in properly socialised neighbourhoods, engaging in clean and lawful activities” (p.31). The concept of magic fits into an understanding of planning through the ideas of performativity that is necessary to articulate places within broader linkages of modernity, bureaucracy and modern states.

Planning is thus a tool adopted by planners, politicians and developers to attract positive forces and counteract specific negative forces involved in delivering the project. It is particularly in the articulation of these different forces that in the following part of this chapter I broach the discussion of social movements. Connecting the plans and those engaged in them, ultimately is a consequence of a performative vision of planning and one that aims to show that every plan can be linked to a “symbolic-socio-technical constellation” rather than “a means to an end” (p.46).

In the approach proposed by Abram (2011), planning and the documents it produces are also inherently political. From this perspective, planning can be traced and documented as a manifestation of a certain historical logic and rationality, with different intellectual and national traditions, schools and debates. These are “socio-historical trajectories” where the tradition of modern bureaucracy is positioned, not just in terms of a conventional, linear history of planning, but as a “performative act” (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011, p.10). Performativity emerging from practices of bureaucracy, accountability and planning is connected to the realms of the modern state and creates a series of relationships and forms of governance emerging from performing specific and prescriptive tasks which
regulate the everyday life of the city. The concept of planning regimes offers an understanding of planning practices and ideas as a belief system and performative activity. This is a definition particularly suitable for the field of land use regulations within Western and European states. Planning regimes can be related to the invention of modern bureaucracy and the consolidation of capitalist nation states; they are "systems of bureaucratic practices emerging from particular socio-historical trajectories" (Abram and Weszkalny, pp.4-5). Following this approach, the master plan of a city, regional housing policy or national planning framework can be traced back to different temporalities. This approach does not ignore the relationships of power and inequality taking place within the cities and neighbourhoods in which planning is often contested and debated. On the contrary, I argue that through understanding anthropological places as continuously produced by the interplay and negotiations between the regimes of planning and politics, we can avoid any pre-determined assumptions over the unfolding of modernity, globalisation and capitalism. This mechanism partly develops and renders more clearly the functioning of the logic of capitalism, modernity and what Ingold had previously called “the logic of inversion” (Ingold, 1993, 2006). In this way what defines the logic of modernity is not just an abstract tendency toward the erasure of spontaneous and inhabited places, but can be exemplified by the necessity of this form of knowledge for espousing a particular future in preference to other possibilities, usually resulting in decisions which are favouring the interests of some people over others. Planning, is thus constituent of anthropological places in a way that requires a solid understanding of the interplay between planning, politics and dwelling.

Unfolding politics with places: activism and practices of imagination in the city

In order to unfold the concept of planning regimes as systems of belief, social movements offer an ontological perspective which embodies the multiple worlds we encounter within a planning controversy. Activists’ practices of contestation against urban transformation, planning and construction sites are relevant for building an anthropological understanding of the constitution of place. This approach is one that opens up our understanding not just
of how places are constituted, but also how they are contested in relation to different visions of modernity and the role that planning plays. The tradition of studies on social movements provides a valuable reference for understanding socio-cultural meanings of protest and political unrest. From the 1980s, the paradigm of “new social movements” has been applied in order to understand the transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial societal organisation of social protests (Castells 1977, Touraine 1988, Melucci 1989, Tarrow, 1989, Della Porta and Diani, 2004). These studies are focused on the practices of new protagonists in the political and democratic arena of modern states and nations such as students, feminists and environmental groups. Such protests were based on specific interests and motivations connected to a changing society. New social movements are thus based on emerging ideas of collective actors which differ from the class and work-based struggles dominating debate until the 1950s (Lumley 1990). This approach means activists make sense of their identities, create new subjectivities and manage to mobilise symbolic, informational and cultural resources.

Tarrow’s (1989) analyses of “protest politics” emerged in strict connection with his attempt to read through the European and Western political uprising between 1965 and 1975. In his study we find an attempt to understand those years through the repertoire of contention of social movements, their political opportunities and constraints, and their cyclical dynamics. His approach proved influential for a new generation of scholars, within both sociology and anthropology, and I propose to focus on those conceptual tools in order to present his arguments in the context of social movement studies. The period he analyses has been fertile to a number of episodes of protests that, in his definition, constitute the beginning of “a new wave of social movements”. Tarrow (1989) mentions “changes in public policy and in the composition of the political class” (p.1) as well as a general broadening of the process of participation to decision making affecting people’s lives as an overall result of this wave. This response is what he calls an extension of the boundaries of mass politics that more concretely can be seen occurring through the

---

6 “Italians in the years 1966-73 were predominantly divided over distributional claims, and not over global ideological issues. Mobilisation had its main base in ordinary people living through a time of economic transition, social change, and policy challenge” (Tarrow, 1989, p. 138).
addition of new forms to the existing “repertoire of participation” (Tarrow, 1989, p.1). Waves of social movements, even if conceived of as transnational, can therefore still be seen as working within the national contexts in which they are played out. In this way disorders in different European contexts have contributed to the broadening of democracy where this was already strong, and its consolidation where it was weak (Tarrow, 1989, p.1). The consideration of those elements is justified in the evaluation of social movements by their capacity to re-negotiate between what is old and new in politics (p.2). Tarrow (1989) assumes that “new social movements” (NSM) signal deep changes in Western societies and their repertoire of participation, but that in order to understand these changes, we need to look at “the entire structure of the conflict, and not only its most dramatic outward features” (Tarrow, 1989, p.3). Cycles of protests specify diversity from one country to the other whilst remaining connected by the fact that national politics shape how people protest; earlier waves of protests and reactions to those actions conditioned the next waves and how these were mobilised. In this framework, at the end of each cycle each country would differentially resolve conflict (Tarrow, 1989, p.4) and the diversities of the contexts where such protests are produced can be accounted for with a more appropriate understanding of the actions themselves.

The “urban scale” offers a second level of analysis and a site for the production of a comparative understanding of social movements. The term “urban social movement” associated with Castells (1977) has been largely discussed within the field of urban anthropology (Signorelli 1996, Low and Zuniga, 2003). A definition of urban social movements seems to offer different interpretations (Lowe, 1986, Pickvance, 2003, Della Porta and Diani, 2004). These can include social movements engaged in city level requests of broadening participation to public life (Della Porta 1999) as well as “organisations standing outside the formal party system which bring people together to defend or challenge the provision of urban public services and to protect the local environment” (Lowie, 1986, p.3). A third scale emerging in the 1990s from the paradigm of new social movement studies (Della Porta 1999) proposed that the study of forms of

---

7 “In retrospect, however, the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s appears in a more positive light. For when the dust of disorder had settled, it became clear that the boundaries of mass politics had been extended” (Tarrow 1989, p.1).
protest movements should follow transnational flows and that global and local network confluences should be privileged. The emergence of transnational anti-globalisation protests challenged the previous paradigms in understanding protests within predefined national and local contexts. This new field focused on both European and non-European contexts and has done since the beginning of a broader contribution from anthropologists (Edelman, 2001, Nash 2005, Kurzman, 2008). The anthropology of social movements was proposed in this context and in relation to broader discussions on the ethics and the methods of engaged and militant research in anthropology. Juris (2008), with his ethnography of Spanish and Barcelona-based anti-globalisation movements, proposed an understanding of social movement practices adopting a concept of “networking logics” which is similar to the post-structural concept of habitus, embodied by activists and constituting the orientation and dispositions of their activities.

The paradigm of place in relation to the dynamics of social movements and urban planning illustrated how this can be obtained. The waves and cycles of social movements and the regimes of urban planning need to be brought together, constituent of temporary and ever-changing events. A multi-relational, open understanding concept of “place” is thus a useful theoretical tool in positioning our understanding of both social movements and planning practices. Adopting theories of place to support the positioning of planning as well as social movement practices within the wider context of everyday life means understanding practices as “embodied ... as part of ... wider ecologies” (Pink, 2012).

Central to this approach is the definition of place as both an “abstract concept” which can be understood as an “event” and “distinct from the notion of locality” (Pink, p.23). To analyse the ways in which people and plans are related within place, the notion of places as “spatio-temporal events” proposed by Massey (2005, p. 130) is adopted by Pink for situating practices of everyday life and activism (2012, p.27). For Massey, the “event of place” is to be understood as “the coming together of the previously unrelated” and as a “constellation of processes rather than a thing” (p.141). This approach should be seen not in opposition, but in addition to, New Social Movements theories. Those theories opened up ways of looking at protests in terms of waves and cycles as processes through which movements are composed and interconnected. Social movements ought to be understood within a predetermined context linking already-existing repertoires to specific
contexts of national, transnational and urban formations. Ultimately, the present thesis proposes a redefinition of how subjects, identities and resources are produced by social movements, not just in terms of ideal models of democracy, economy and modernity, but as emplaced forms where multi-scale linkages are operationalised.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed different approaches to the understanding of urban anthropology, the anthropology of place, planning and social movements. I have argued that theories of place facilitate an understanding of planning controversies, and the study of social movements offers a context where it is possible to position those forms of activism. Discussing the opportunities opened up by taking a relational approach to place I have acknowledged that this provides a sensibility toward the practices of making and re-making the world that lies at the core of social movements and planning regimes in the city, but cannot be applied without including, and thus considering, its relation with the redefinition of the political debate at different scales. I have therefore considered different approaches to the understanding of place facilitating its political nature and its contingency with the establishment of particular planning regimes. Acknowledging and developing the idea of place following these considerations is central to unfolding the relations and connections that sustain and compose social movements and contestations. Exploring the multi-scalar connections between place and broader narrative forms such as modernity and the state, I have proposed to balance relational and phenomenological approaches with an understanding of the socio-historical trajectories entangled within global, regional and local contexts. For this I have proposed to consider urban social movements, in addition to simpler planning controversies, as specifically situated within contradictory and contested linkages, thus capable of playing a vital role in the unfolding of planning as a performative tool. Binding together an understanding of social movements within the urban scale my research contributes through shedding light on how forms of knowing are produced as part of the process of interpreting and contesting planning. It is in this direction that Chapters 6 and 8 of my thesis present the evolution of
planning practices in Milan as those which are running parallel with the developments that inform political and social movements both in Italy as well as within the *periferia*. This same approach is then further explored in the case of the Gronda Nord controversy by considering the practices of contestation sustained in Quarto Oggiaro (Chapters 9 and 11) and more generally in the analysis of how local politics and neighbourhood controversies are performed in the neighbourhood (Chapter 10).
Chapter 3: Producing engagement, placing anthropological knowledge

In this chapter, I discuss my methodology for researching neighbourhood controversies. I propose to connect the idea of anthropological places as an analytical nexus to address multiple socialities, spatialities and temporalities taking part in and engaging with issues of reflexivity and collaboration. Emplaced research, beyond ethnographic methods, as a broader understanding of anthropological work, is intended as an approach whereby persons, texts, documents and images both constitute and contribute at various levels in the making of places. Within this framework, the acts of writing, photographing, walking and archiving position the research process within broader scales of engagement. Aiming to situate the researcher within this relational process, I discuss the ethical challenges of facilitating engagement and collaborative research.

Reflexivity, relationality and the multiple perspective of anthropological places

In this thesis the idea of anthropological places is used as a multi-spatial and temporal situation where processes of inhabiting and connecting with the world occur. The concept of anthropological places - initially developed in Augé (2000) (see Chapter 1 of this thesis for a discussion of my own contribution to this concept) – contains the potential for collaborative and reflexive understanding of research. Our encounters in the field are continually re-visited and redefined throughout the stages of anthropological work via a series of ethnographic methods as well as forms of re-working data and material produced and collected from archives and academic literature. Writing in conjunction with other ways of documenting and representing our experiences is a central element for expanding anthropological work beyond ethnographic methods. Immersion in the field in this way should be understood as a condition happening not just during field research but also before and after it, when one is entrenched in the process of organising knowledge between what we know and what still remains to be known (Strathern, 1999). Writing in particular can be seen as a ‘second field’ where “the ideas and narratives which made
sense of everyday field experience have to be rearranged to make sense in the context of arguments and analyses addressed to another audience” (Strathern, 1999, pp. 1-2). Extending the ‘ethnographic moment’ beyond its initial development during fieldwork we understand anthropological knowledge as the relation between “the understood (what is analysed at the moment of observation)” and “the need to understand (what is observed at the moment of analysis)” (ibid., p. 6). In this definition our concepts of places and the experiences manifested therein are altered by the impact of time upon our perceptions. As we view our impressions of these places over time, the ways in which we approach and make sense of these impressions maintains a pivotal role in shaping our ways of knowing.

The process of inhabiting place is central in shaping the way anthropological work is established and transformed (Ingold and Lee, 2008). This process is one which requires a broad rethinking of both fieldwork and the making of anthropological knowledge. I propose thinking of this shift as one toward an emplaced research consisting in working with the idea of place not just as a bounded unit, but as a relationally inhabited, open process, or indeed as a constellation within the wider topographies of space (Massey, 2005, p. 131). In the confines of this open configuration, the role of reflexivity and autobiography ought to be regarded as a central element. Reflexivity facilitates the exploration of everyday life by unfolding the ways of knowing we encounter and produce in the field and beyond. A relational understanding of place asks anthropologists to question the way we produce our research not just in the context of fieldwork but also while we reproduce our experiences as part of an anthropological work. The relevance of reflexivity and autobiography within this epistemological approach consists not just of bringing in more contextualisation but transcending the anthropologist’s self (Okely, 1992, p. 2) and creating a series of “conditions of reciprocity, asymmetry or potential exploitation” (Okely, 1992, p. 3). This resonates with a practice of ‘juxtaposition’ of experiences which facilitates “the illumination or complication of one or the other” (Collins and Gallinat, 2010, p.14). Understanding place as an open bundle of trajectories and movements for example should not lead us to discard ideas of locality and bounded engagement. Questions of representations of locality in the context for political action cannot always be analysed through ideas of “multivocality”, “displacement” and
“movement” (Stacul, 2003, p. 7). The meanings of locality within a context of research are constructed by different actors, such as residents, politicians and indeed by all those who live in a certain place with stability. The meaning and relevance of their mobility could vary and might not necessarily define the way people think of themselves either socially, politically or culturally. This does not entail taking the rootedness of people in their own territories for granted, but rather means looking at “locality” as it is represented and described by individual social actors, and as the context for observing how all-encompassing “global”, national and regional systems interact with local meaning at the most intimate levels (Stacul, 2003 p.7).

Understanding anthropological work as a collaborative endeavour ultimately redefines the relationship between theory and practice in anthropology. Collaboration in this sense entails a tool for defining an intervention and a space in which to establish relations that can either aim to change the existing power geometries or define ways of doing that broaden the possibilities of actions within the actual situation. Ultimately this approach resonates with an understanding of anthropology as a practice of learning with people and as an “enquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world” (Ingold, 2011, p. 242). Within this interpretation, ethnography is to be seen not as ‘a method’ but as a practice of description of other people’s lives (Ingold, 2011, p. 242). In this way my research discusses how Italian urban places transcend geographical limits and locations in order to bring together and position the entanglement between different practices. By adopting such a positioning, my work aims to open up the way we generate knowledge and broaden the possibility of research through a methodology which is more than merely ethnographic. Ethnography in this sense can be conceptualised, not just as a “servant of anthropological theory”, but “as the source for a critique of anthropological practice, of what theory does” (Herzfeld, 1987, p. 6). In this way we obtain a better placed “framework of comparison" between “anthropological theory and indigenous experience” (Herzfeld, 1987, p. 16). These propositions offer an understanding of anthropology as a philosophical, theoretical and comparative discipline that forms its knowledge by being in the world. What my thesis aims to develop by adopting such an approach is a more specific way of dealing with the challenges and the tensions that a relational ontology of place entails when working in an urban neighbourhood of Europe like Quarto Oggiaro.
Taking positions: Engagement and collaborative practices in the field

Conducting research with people involved in a situation of political and planning controversy opens a troubling number of questions as to how researchers can and should be explicit about their positions, credos and their ethical stances. In this section I thus introduce and discuss ideas of engaged anthropology (Sheper-Huges, 1995, Herzfeld, 2010), militant ethnography (Juris, 2007, 2008), challenges of intellectual partisanship (Kertzer, 1980), the Italian notion of *impegno* (Ward, 2001) and *conricerca* or co-research (Tronti, 1971). Unfolding the theoretical, ethical and methodological grounding of engaged research propositions, I examine here these discussions in terms of relational understanding of place. This means exploring the production of knowledge that happens during the research as processes of inhabiting place together with our interlocutors. Articulating an analytical framework in terms of engaged research can contribute to the refinement of how we position different ways of dwelling in the field. In order to further develop the questions and challenges which are raised by an engaged and collaborative anthropology as discussed above, I explore how these create common practices with forms of contestation and protests. Such practices distinctly relate to forms of intellectual and political engagement that cannot be ignored when discussing political and planning activism in context. This comprises Gledhill’s understanding of anthropology’s role as one which delivers unexpected information about the (real) world and forces us towards reviewing fundamental categories and theoretical models of knowing (2005). This point of view is similar to Ingold’s (2012) understanding of anthropology as being, by necessity, a generalising and comparative endeavour and indeed one which ultimately provides a more clear distinction between theoretical and empirical models of knowing. Practices of engaged anthropology aim to offer a deeper positioning of the discipline within the political landscape in which they are composed. Herzfeld (2010) proposes that we think of an engaged anthropology as an involvement between academic pursuits and those of its informants (2010, p.625). Following this proposition, the approach to anthropological engagement Herzfeld (2010) proposed embodies an understanding of both the
relationship between the anthropologist with the informant in the field, and the expanding potential within the role of anthropologists as intellectuals and thus political actors. Central for his model of engaged anthropology is the concept of critical relativism. Aiming to reverse the reification produced by an essentialist understanding of human life emerging from the likes of stakeholders, bureaucrats, politicians and speculators, Herzfeld (2009) proposes that we think of anthropological engagement as an involvement between academic pursuits and those of its informants (2009, p. 625). Discussing his research experiences in urban neighbourhoods, he argued that essentialist logic and discourses impose their claims upon weaker and marginal populations, thereby reducing the complexity of everyday experiences to a static, docile culture.

I now consider how categories of engagement have been developed both within and in relation to the Italian intellectual and political sphere, by aiming to ground my argument within more specific historical and cultural debates. Studying ideas of political oppositions in an Italian working class neighbourhood, Kertzer (1980) argued that within a context of “socio-political polarization” (1980, p. 21) social science researchers could only problematically be thought to be neutral or apolitical. In the 1980s, during the process of his own fieldwork, the Communists and Catholics were engaged in longstanding political, social and moral division. In this context intellectuals were expected to take a stance on either side of this division but, as an American, Kertzer was given permission to occupy a role outside of this system which as he himself acknowledges was “to an extent not easily accomplished by an Italian” (1980, p. 21). While a non-partisan approach could lead to a deeper exploration of both sides within a political controversy, there are also situations where such an option could be discharged in order to produce more collaborative interventions in the field and beyond. With particular focus on the expectations of non-partisanship that we might encounter in the field, over the course of this thesis I address in more detail the different forms of engagement that we can build as part of our research. I argue that we can pursue a better understanding of such issues by looking at the history of Italian intellectuals’ political engagement. The idea of impegno, in reference to cultural, professional and artistic realms, is strongly connected to the Italian post-war debate over a particular understanding of intellectual work (Ward, 2001). This understanding has become increasingly central in Italy since the eruption of the 1968
protests and its practice extended in the seventies within political activist groups such as Autonomia Operaia, Lotta Continua and Movimento Studentesco. These groups asked their members to meet with the working classes to prepare them for revolutionary events, which would often include producing forms of social inquiries that would support the understanding of working class conditions and existing struggles both in the workplace as well as in the cities, the neighbourhood, and the homes. Within the emergence of the student movement in 1968 it is possible to trace the spread of newly-articulated theories of worker inquiries and the development of co-research (Alquati, 1993) as part of a new engagement intended to bring together students and workers. By developing a critique of the traditional left parties these political groups operated mainly in “extra-parliamentary terms” and with direct actions of support for the working class and proletarians. These included an understanding of the work of the intellectual class as a co-production of ‘organic’ and ultimately militant knowledge with and for the working classes. Note here that militante in Italian can be used as a synonym for ‘activist’ and does not indicate a military category or favouring confrontational or violent methods in support of a political or social cause. It is thus within this particular understanding that I use the words militante and militant, in my work.

The commitment to an engaged, and even militant approach to anthropology does not necessarily have to occlude engagement with a multiplicity of political practices in the field. On the contrary, by adhering to the framework of emplaced research that I put forward in this thesis, and also by taking a position, the anthropologist is able to experience the configuration of political controversies and objections as part of everyday life and broader social environments. In this case, the researcher situates himself within the trajectories of different political organisations and can take part in and engage with the on-going constitution of political events such as electoral campaigns or public debates. Discussing his work with activists belonging to anti-global transnational networks, Jeff Juris (2007, 2008) proposes a method of engagement with participants that he refers to as “militant ethnography” (2007, 2008) that can be seen as a continuation of previous approaches calling for anthropological engagement such as the one of Scheper-Hughes, (1995). In the works of both Juris (2007, 2008) and Scheper-Hughes, (1995), the reference to “militant ethnography” indicates a particular vicinity and proactive
attitude of the anthropologist to the issues and the concerns of his or her interlocutors in the field. Both Juris and Scheper-Hughes thus see the role of the anthropologist as one who operates within activist networks as a militant of their cause more than as a neutral observer. For Juris, the logic of activist practices can only be grasped by becoming an active practitioner. This approach is one of attempting to “overcome the divide between research and practice” by “collaboratively [producing] ethnographic knowledge” (2007, p.165). Referring to his own ethnographic experience with Spanish and other European activist groups, he explains how “helping to organize actions and workshops, facilitating meetings, weighing in during strategic and tactical debates” (p.20) produced forms of engagement, education and an understanding of activists’ practices unlikely to be otherwise obtained. This understanding of militant ethnography pushes the anthropologist to take a political position and put their own body on the line during mass direct actions (Juris, 2008 p.20). The methodology employed creates a space between activist and academic knowledge; constructing common practices and providing forms of understanding that can be as useful to the activists themselves as to the researcher (Juris, 2007, 165). It is an approach which resonates with the broader call for an engaged interpretation of research practices and can be traced back to earlier anthropological debates in the mid-1990s. Then, the necessity for a “personally engaged and politically committed” practice was proposed over a more relativistic and distanced form of anthropological knowing (Scheper-Hughes, 1995)\(^8\). Scheper-Hughes reclaimed the primacy of ethics in pursuing anthropological research and suggested a responsibility of anthropologists toward the creation of “politically complicated and morally demanding” works. Juris and Scheper-Hughes’ proposition for militant ethnography thus offers the possibility of unfolding anthropological engagement politically and using it as a direct source for understanding social movements, organisations and communities. Such ethical and methodological propositions are still relevant for anthropologists working with controversies and contested situations today. I recognise the necessity to further frame this argument within the anthropological project of broader engagement with the public in

\(^8\) Scheper-Hughes, (1995) by refusing the practices of neutrality and moral relativism in anthropology called for “politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity, and bad faith that allow the suffering and the deaths to continue” (1995, p.417).
order to take seriously our interlocutors in the field. The questions raised require further discussion of how anthropological research can claim to contribute to our interlocutor’s political and legal controversies as well as to their social and emotional context. Ultimately such questions require an unfolding of our own theoretical positioning and an awareness of the ways our anthropological knowing is often informed by our experiences in the field.

The understanding of engaged and militant ethnography I have sketched above consists of an increasingly collaborative and engaged practice which resonates with ideas of academic engagement with the people we research and this fosters an ethic of sharing and co-creating our research. If adopted in this sense, Herzfeld’s (2009) proposition of anthropological engagement similarly to Schepers-Hughes (1995) and Juris (2007, 2008), the ethnographer accepts an inevitable distortion in his perspective, as a participant in political and cultural processes of change (p.265). It is in this sense that, within my research, I argue that this contribution is central to engage with a multiplicity of practices and socialities emerging from the field. By taking part in the definition of political practices, we can contribute to shaping the field we inhabit. This goes beyond the strict definition of militant ethnography, where the ethnographer’s contribution is confused with his political capacity. It is in this sense that I consider my work in the field to be more specifically collaborative than militant. This is an understanding of anthropological practice as a collaborative, necessarily engaging endeavour that can produce effects and interventions both ethnographically in the field and beyond. Work such as this, occurs in the continuous interaction between different temporalities and spatialities; the one of the field and the desk as well as the one of the archive and its re-imagination across different temporalities and spatialities.

**Walking, writing and picturing beyond the scales of the field**

The scales through which we come to produce our anthropological knowing are central for how we position ourselves in relation to our interlocutors. Following an emplaced approach to ethnographic research within my work, multiple temporalities and spatialities
are interwoven with anthropological place. In order to further expand on how anthropological places are co-created through research I advance here how ethnographic methodologies including guided walking, photographic visits and collaborative writings can further increase our understanding of how places can be made. Consciously moving beyond traditional ethnographic methods I also discuss the possibilities offered by archival research within the realm of photography, urban history, mapping and planning. Weaving together these ethnographic and historical methodologies I advocate for a necessary multiplication of the capacities of anthropological places as sites of collaborative engagement.

A relational understanding of place is coherent when reconsidering the role of walking in relation to embodiment and sociability (Lee and Ingold, 2006, Ingold and Vergunst, 2008) and this can be expanded further to other ways of documenting and thinking about the field. This constitutes an approach that perspicuously defines the capacity of walking as part of a process of "learning" and "being together" (Lee and Ingold, 2006, p.83). Similarly to walking, photography can be understood from an emplaced perspective as constituting of a set of historical, material and social practices. Aiming to create a visual as well as a written contribution, my thesis accounts for the relationality of place through its visual and material composition. In Chapters 7, 9 and 10 of my thesis I investigate the multiple possibilities offered by photographic practices and the ways in which they collaboratively inhabit and constitute anthropological places. The category of *fotografia impegnata* thus fits within this definition as a genre within a socio-historical period. Tano D'Amico, one of the most famous activist photographer of this time, described this position as one in which the photographer is part of the protest and his images give shape to the dreams and hopes of a movement even when these cannot be realised in practice (1998, p.18). In Chapter 9 and 10 I approach photography as a documentary practice within planning and political controversy in Quarto Oggiaro. Therein I have intended my own photographic practice with activists and campaigners as a device for collaboration and co-research. At the same time I have explored how photography was adopted as part of activist groups. This is an understanding of photography as assembling values and ideals that define the aims and objectives of controversies as well as the practices that characterise activist actions.
The materiality and relationality of photography are already central to approaches to visual and photographic practices (Edwards and Hart 2004, Edwards, 2001, 2009, Banks and Vokes 2010). Their approaches widened the scope of research and understanding for the anthropology of photography as well as instigating a deconstruction of broadened visual and sensory knowledge. Pink (2007, 2012) contributed to the connection of the realm of photography and particularly in non-professional practices within the dimension of place making and the construction of socially inhabited relationships. Following on from these initial developments I propose that photographic archives can be understood as sites for engaging the history of a social movement as well as the history of place. Archives are referenced in Edwards (2001) as an “accumulation of micro-relationships in which objects are involved” (p.29). It is through exploring these relationships that we can ultimately contribute to and directly engage with the active role of photography in the constitution of place.

Connecting with the theoretical approaches I have discussed in the first chapter, we can now understand Pink’s (2012) practice of walking and picturing as contributing to unravelling the multiplicity and “simultaneity of stories so far” (Massey 2005) composing place. Following Pink (2012, p.38) and revisiting Augé’s (2000) terminology, I proposed in the first chapter to rethink the configuration of the ethnographic research site in terms of anthropological place. Adopting a similar terminology, Pink (2012) claims “ethnographic places” are contexts constituted through different forms of engagement, everyday socialities, materialities and experiences of which research is part. A “research-place-event” is thus made through engagement as we conduct the research9 (p.38). Adopting this approach, research walks as well as practices of researching and engaging the photographic and historical are reconfigured here as contributing to “ethnographic places” (Pink 2012, p. 38). These are often composed collaboratively and offer new forms of understanding the everyday practices in the various locales where they occur. Both writing and engaging visual and historical archives and local memories in the course of my fieldwork provided me with a broad range of opportunities for collaboration with

9 “We are part of the research-place-event as we do research” (p.38). Here Pink adopts a concept similar to Massey’s (2005) “place as event” (p.145)
different activists and inhabitants that took part in my research and with whom I have shared my time in the field.

In order to make sense of the multiplicity of stories and trajectories that are entangled within place it is crucial to discuss the ways scale and the proportions are experienced and produced along practices of walking as well as the ones of photographing, writing and archiving. Ultimately, this means inquiring how many layers we are required to unravel, follow and relate to, in order to create our understanding of the social, sensory and material composition of place. To be more specific, if we return to the context of walking and photographing, which political, technical and economical trajectories become relevant to local activists and their protests? To answer these questions I propose an adoption of the concept of scale as an element of productive balance between engagement and the complexity of places. In chapters 1 and 2, I mobilised the concept of place as containing a multiplicity of agencies between planning, activism and politics. Proposing to follow Strathern (1991, 1999) in her articulation of scale and its ethnographic effects for the configuration of multiple and partial knowledge practices, I will argue that the practice of walking offers a particularly relevant account of how place and scale can be woven together ethnographically. Strathern (1991) introduced a theoretical discussion of the concept of scale within anthropological theory as a productive metaphor to account for the necessity of organising the complexity of knowing. Strathern's acknowledgment of the partial nature of anthropological knowledge is central for rethinking the mutual constitution between people and place. The relativizing effect of scale can be adopted as a central analytical tool for addressing place ethnographically. This needs to be intended not as a unity but more concretely as a “partial connection” (Strathern 1999). Considering anthropology as a generalising practice, her approach explores the ways holism can be reconstructed and adopted within a constant self-reflexive endeavour. In doing this she recognises the limit of such an approach with what she called the “the relativizing effect” (2004, xiv). This is a recognition that other

---

10 The concept of scale (often in association to the one of place) has received much attention in geography (Brenner, 2001) and its implications for anthropological and ethnographic practices have been discussed in relation to kinship and property value (Strathern, 1999, 2004) urban and industrial transformation (Corsín Jiménez, 2005), and architectural practices (Yaneva, 2005).
perspectives always exist beyond our knowledge, generating a sense of the necessary partiality of anthropological approaches. Together with this partiality, anthropological knowledge is thus proposed by Strathern with the capacity of infinite multiplication of any phenomena (1991, xiv). This consideration, in the context of anthropological engagement with activists as well as with politicians and planners has important consequences for how we can read the forms of attachments and detachments central to the constitution of place.

This approach to scale proposed by Strathern, thus offers a way to balance the different perspectives that configure and constitute place by focusing on the nature of the existing anthropological relations and perceptions. These can be identified with both the existing connections that inhabitants perform within the built environment and the imagined futures designed and planned for them. Ultimately, the concept of scale performs a magnification of place and extends the dimensions of its relevance through different social, cultural and political constitutions. Recognising these effects of scale is proposed by Strathern not as a solution, but as a necessary acknowledgment of the disproportions that are potentially produced by ethnographic descriptions. Understanding the scale through which these are imagined and expressed becomes fundamentally central for also approaching the concept of place and how this could be adopted to inform anthropological fieldwork. Collaborative approaches to anthropological research illustrate how multiple scales comprise the experience of place and how this can be followed and engaged with ethnographically in the field. Walking, picturing and archiving within my own anthropological practice is thus more than a method for it constitutes a more radical way of addressing both theoretical and methodological practices within and beyond the ethnographic setting.

**Imagining and specifying ethnographic ethics of collaboration**

Practicing collaborative research bears consequences on the ways in which we identify and latterly account for different ethical issues before, during and after fieldwork. To
consider the ethics of engagement in relation to the way anthropological work is practiced requires taking a series of precautions, limitations and interventions, and these ethics should be articulated in the contexts of activism, planning and politics. From my position as a researcher in Milan, and given the nature of my research, it was necessary to frequently enter into engagement with legal and planning frameworks affecting the area I worked in, and I had to quickly ascertain how such systems are made, function, and the ways in which they are contested. Articulating formal codes of practices, together with theoretical discussion of research ethics, as well as bringing in an open discussion of methodological approaches and methods in the field provide a useful resource in understanding the potential pitfalls of anthropological engagement. I have attempted to open up the framework of my research within different contexts of the neighbourhood and the locales where I have spent most of my time. In particular, a great deal of my work, including the manifold questions and issues I was there to explore, were shaped by sharing discussion with a large number of activists and inhabitants in Quarto Oggiaro.

As primary reference for the articulation of ethical issues of my research methods I mostly employed the ASA’s (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth) ethical guidelines\(^\text{11}\), though I also consulted an Italian version provided by the AISEA, which proved somewhat similar in its advice\(^\text{12}\). The ethical application of my research proposal was approved by the ethical advisory committee of Loughborough University\(^\text{13}\), and this provided an additional element central to the configuration of my research practices before conducting my fieldwork. As a first significant level of engagement with the field, I gained the consent of research participants, this was the result of a process of negotiation and one which may require renegotiation over time. During my fieldwork I developed the ethical implications of my ethnographical research along specific ethical issues; this included considering informant consent, and maintaining an awareness of the possibility of, and indeed the right of participants to voice, objections.

\(^\text{11}\) http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml (Last accessed 02/10/2015)
\(^\text{12}\) http://www.aisea.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=117 (Last accessed 02/10/2015)
\(^\text{13}\) http://www.lboro.ac.uk/committees/ethics-approvals-human-participants/additionalinformation/codesofpractice/ (Last accessed 02/10/2015)
to collaboration around my research interests. During my fieldwork, these guidelines offered a solid basis in ensuring the protection of participants and maintaining a sense of respect toward their involvement. Several of my informants were initially surprised to hear of the existence and implementation of these ethical guidelines. Even if they had been interviewed by journalists or students in the past, they had never been offered official written information stating ethical clearance. Their surprise at this new transparent approach to the process of interviewing, recording and taking pictures, was linked to my association with a British research institution and not necessarily connected to my anthropological background. It took time to incorporate and embed this procedure within the routine of my research practices. A great deal of time was spent sending potential participants consent forms via email or providing printed out versions, which facilitated a space where we could discuss the aims of my work and its methods of research. This allowed potential research subjects to clearly understand what they were consenting to, and the constitution of their rights after I obtained their consent.

In the case of visual images, my research involved a procedure of informed consent, specifying the forms of dissemination and the possible uses of images. In these instances, I considered it necessary to reframe my discussion and analyses of my ethnographic experience in relation to how pictures taken in public places could have ethical consequences for the persons involved. As a measure taken to protect participants from undesirable consequences of the research, I have thus maintained their anonymity even when their activities and political engagement were conducted, without restriction, in public. However, I have decided to maintain the actual place-names where I conducted my fieldwork. At the same time, in an instance later discussed in chapter 7, I collaboratively assisted with a photographic archive and produced a public exhibition in the neighbourhood. This particular case offered me an opportunity to learn about the ways in which the photographs themselves can continually shift between private and public spaces, mobilising new significance for a broader group of people. This shift proves particularly relevant when photography is understood as a practice of political engagement which informs the practices of contestation and protests. Within this situation, not only do ethnographers need to position themselves within a rapidly changing
landscape but they are also offered the possibility of learning how these practices are made significant by our interlocutors.

My intention to become somehow involved with the micro dimensions of local activism within an otherwise substantial urban neighbourhood gave me some opportunity to discuss my work with groups of activists and local inhabitants involved in grassroots activities. This involved navigating different forms of sociality within the neighbourhood and understanding these formed an emplacement of the politics of planning and contestation. These forms of sociality, which included a broad range of activities such as meetings, discussions, celebrations, and parties, organised by a varied number of informal grassroots networks, have provided me with an important context for understanding the meaning of politics and its impact on local life. It was indeed in those contexts - normally operating on a level of apolitical status – when politics which impacted upon everyday routines was frequently discussed, that it became increasingly entangled with my own fieldwork. The presence of semi-organised groups, committees and associations of citizens running and organising a wide range of activities relating to everyday public life in the neighbourhood provided a backdrop for analysing and placing planning activism and construction site contestations in the neighbourhood. I continuously refer to this informal network which proved so vital to conducting my research. By attending and taking part in the network activities, I could personally participate in the different levels of neighbourhood grassroots life. This network of sociality revealed itself to be an essential resource for a broad range of activities as well as events within the neighbourhood. Their capacity to collaborate and negotiate their position with different institutional actors in the city as well as with the different political parties and political organisations provided a relevant framework for the positioning of my research. While the field of politics could expand within the realm of both local grassroots movements and planning controversies, and also encompass other categories of Milanese urban life, the relationships between the different subjects involved produced forms of collaboration and co-creation of social meaning that cannot be ignored when discussing the entanglement of politics within urban life in an Italian neighbourhood. In the course of my fieldwork I practiced several forms of collaboration with residents and activists in Quarto Oggiaro. One example resulted in the co-researching, editing and writing of some short written and
video pieces which investigated the anti-privatisation protests of a group of social housing tenants (see Chapter 10). A second example of my collaborative approach in the field resulted in a photographic exhibition that I co-curated along with two local youth groups, Spazio Baluardo and Quarto Posto, and with Cesare Snelli, a local photographer. The exhibition was produced through an archival research of Cesare Snelli’s photographic archive and a series of interviews conducted with some of Cesare’s friends and compagni (see Chapter 7). The process of selecting the photographs, producing interviews and editing the resultant booklet, was conducted in collaboration with members of the two youth collectives and Cesare, as we were all involved in interviewing, editing and transcribing. In this instance, the exhibition project provided me with an opportunity to become involved in the making of a small-scale collaborative research, which led to my increased engagement with the neighbourhood.

Summary

This chapter argues that fieldwork is constructed through the tensions and the conflicts erupting from its multiple trajectories. I proposed to adopt the concept of anthropological places as a tool for situating and theorising these tensions. Intending participant observation “through a theory of place” (Pink 2009: 64), my methodological engagement includes co-participation in the activities of everyday social activism as well as in the multiple sites where activism happens. The shift produced by this approach, transforms fieldwork as we inhabit and impacts upon the ways in which we analyse and write up our experiences. One of the central elements of my understanding of place is defined by a co-implication between the researcher and his or her informants whom I also refer to as ‘interlocutors’. For this reason, the experience of the researcher and the composition of ethnographic places, should be seen as a result of an engagement with the field and the relationships that result from it. In order to further develop the concept of “ethnographic places”, the relationship between anthropology and ethnography, as well as between anthropological knowledge and the knowledge of those we encounter in the field must be questioned. I argue that thinking of these complex relations as mutually constituted ties
together ethnographic practice and anthropological theory. Forms of collaborative research are here adopted to balance relationships of engagement emerging from social movements (Chapter 8 and 10). In the course of my work I show how the practice of engagement is an intellectual category, empirically connected to specific protests and social movements (Chapter 9 and 10).
Chapter 4: Ethnographic introductions: imagining anthropological practices in movement

In this chapter, introducing the practices of arrival connected to my fieldwork, I present my own engagement in terms of connections with place, collaboration and establishing of a dwelling routine. In writing the story of my arrival I present my own engagement with fieldwork through relational theories of place. Through this framework I expand my attention to practices of making a life in the field, such as finding a house, and moving, to building an everyday practice within the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro and beyond. Discussing the challenges and limits of ethnographic fieldwork in such a context - an urban neighbourhood of a European and Northern Italian city - I contribute towards rethinking traditional ways of understanding construction of anthropological knowledge. Proposing to look at anthropology as a practice of learning, dwelling and engaging relationally with places, I viewed my accommodation as a place composed of multiple scales, entangled relations, and the practices of contestations and processes of dwelling.

Arrival practices and the re-composition of home anthropology

The ways of imagining, writing and constructing a field site are central in shaping the construction of anthropological knowledge. The very act of arriving in the field is a focal element in the definition of anthropological engagement and has often been used to discuss the epistemological and methodological challenges of anthropological research (Marcus, 1995, Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Amit 2000) and constitutes a “recognizable anthropological subgenre” and a “conventional component of ethnographies” (Pratt, 1986, p. 31). Here, drawing on these debates I question how arrival stories can be adopted to reinterpret the way place is conceptualised within ethnographic fieldwork. Arrival stories form central narratives within the production of anthropological knowledge and the construction of fieldwork as they often mediate “a contradiction within the discipline between personal and scientific authority” (Pratt, 1986, p.32). These stories,
and the imagination connected to them, have been critically discussed as rhetorical devices for the construction of a supposed “ethnographic authority” and as a fetishised evidence of a temporal and spatial dislocation based on the fact of “being there” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The ways in which these defining practices are constructed and constituted inform the imagination of ethnographic fieldwork and the way it is able to produce anthropological knowledge (Amit 2000, Candea 2007, Falzon 2009). Forcing the ethnographer to define moments of entrance and exit, arrival stories inscribe boundaries onto potentially boundless places. The arrival in the field and its narration afterwards give ethnographers an environment in which to position their work. This context was constantly organised, planned and discussed at the different stages of the research before and after fieldwork, and also during the process of writing up (for a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 3). Anthropological places, from this perspective, can be seen as the result of an intersection between different layers of theoretical and empirical contribution contracted through the relations with the people and the locales of one’s fieldwork. In the course of this chapter, and through a series of ethnographic accounts, I explain how my own personal trajectory within the city of Milan can be seen as relevant for the constitution of my fieldwork. Drawing from my own research engagement I develop a series of ethnographic accounts and sketches to discuss the constitution of anthropological places. Discussing my own “enfielding” (Candea, 2010, p.2) I propose thinking how Milan was performed within my own experience as an anthropological context and the meaning of doing anthropology at “home” (Jackson, 1987, Strathern 1987, Hannertz 2010). From this perspective emerges the whole process of constructing fieldwork as a practice of cutting and making boundaries where there are no such boundaries (Amit, 2000; Candea 2007).

Bringing my own arrival in the field as part of a movement from the desk to the field (and back) I aim to trace a series of relationships, forming what I propose to view as geometry of engagement between groups of people, individuals and places within the neighbourhood. These fluxes of connections, similarly to Massey’s “geometry of power” (2005, p.85) are constructed through forms of engagement around and along the field and can be adopted to unfold how sociality is articulated and reproduced. In this conceptual scheme, the production of anthropological knowledge can be seen as the capacity of making visible the heterogeneous relations between people and a disclosure
of how things come to be known (Strathern, 1999). Central to my understanding of this disclosure process, my own practice of research can be viewed as a form of dwelling itself, entangled with a constellation of processes (Massey 2005, p.141) and practices informing the constitution of place. Putting my home at the centre of this process, my work in the field can be understood as forming a sense of continuity within my theoretical understanding of place. This approach stresses the importance of the lines traced by our movements (Ingold, 2011, p.168), and views this act and creating connections in the field as vital components in the configuration of my research. This is both an ambulatory process (Ingold 2000) and one where the idea that space is socially produced (Falzon 2009). Drawing on Ingold’s (2011) approach, here I discuss my own engagement as happening in movement and in transition along and within the field. Leaving one’s home to get to the field can thus be seen as a central shifting element for rethinking the definition of what is “home” and what is “away” in terms of my ethnographic engagement. I start the description of my arrival story some distance before actually beginning my fieldwork. More precisely, I will try to explore the geometry of engagement between home and fieldwork as central to the understanding of practices informing the constitution of anthropological places.

Before introducing my actual arrival in Quarto Oggiaro, it is important to clarify my first impression of the neighbourhood based on my previous experience and perceptions. While undertaking my Urban Design Master in spring 2006, I first entered into Quarto Oggiaro entirely by accident; for it was a day on which it struck me that although much of Milan was familiar I was curious to explore the parts I did not know. Quarto Oggiaro happened to be the last stop on the bus-line, and so I found myself getting off the bus and standing there – with no idea of how this place would later come to impact on me and my work. I was initially fascinated by the contrasts between the beautiful day, large park and the social housing blocks which were so unlike the architecture and spatial dynamic commonly found in the centre of Milan. In this area marked with graffiti and discarded rubbish, I strongly felt a sense of social abandonment, and it struck me as dangerous although my perceptions may also have been coloured by the notorious reputation of Quarto Oggiaro’s strong links to mafia criminality. Later that same year, I was selected to co-ordinate a team based in Quarto Oggiaro for a development agency tackling the
redevelopment of deprived neighbourhoods. I then continued to work in the area over the following two years, both as part of my job and for the dissertation of my second Master degree in Anthropology.

In the course of this period, I happened to witness two separate incidents which shocked me, and reflected the occasionally extreme nature of Quarto Oggiaro. While travelling during the day by public transport, scenes of tension and conflict between other passengers culminated in the stabbing of two young men. Fortunately I was not closely involved, but both episodes certainly provoked a sense of insecurity in me. Later, when relating these narratives to my informants in the field, they were often shocked. However, this provided an opportunity for my informants to share their own experiences of similar episodes in Quarto Oggiaro. In this we could see patterns in action which could only be associated with the elements of the neighbourhood which were linked to criminality. The reoccurrence of this sense of insecurity happened in the following months when, after a day of work for the project, I found myself alone at dusk walking in the neighbourhood, trying to find my way to the train station to catch a train home. My disorientation, and the growing awareness that this made me appear vulnerable, heightened my sense of the potential danger that walking in such a stigmatised neighbourhood could bring. I could see burnt-out cars and motorbikes parked in the streets, and the looks I received from those standing around the cafes suggested it was obvious that I did not belong there. My association with a local institution also made me feel partly out of place, for I knew of the local challenges that the project had encountered in its making. Yet, in reality, I passed through the area and reached the train station without hindrance, and the course of my year-long fieldwork in Quarto Oggiaro a few years later, proved the area to be safe and indeed much more socially inclusive than central areas of Milan I had resided in before. Still, I remember my first days alone during fieldwork as a time when I felt, especially at night, a bit nervous walking in certain areas in which I had previously heard or read of episodes of criminality associated with drug trafficking and murders.

Pre-existing expectations or interpretations of place are changed by gaining knowledge of the area’s geography and these are also contextualised through developing interpersonal connections which serve to embed our experiences within places which
may at first appear to us as alien or ‘Other’. These environments are materially constituted – featuring artefacts such as burnt-out vehicles – and such hallmarks of the environment are then normalised by continuous exposure. This is a similar circumstance to a point I later explore in Chapter 9, when I discuss how residents began to circumnavigate the maze of construction fences that crossed their usual routes through the neighbourhood. Despite my initial fears, and even though Quarto Oggiaro has been portrayed in the past 40 years as the most dangerous neighbourhood in the city of Milan and under the control of Mafia families, my own stay was, in the main, safe and accepted without much suspicion by my interlocutors. Once I became involved in the activities organised by neighbourhood grassroots groups I felt part of a large family. Thanks to this condition, by the time the end of my fieldwork, the number of people that I could meet and talk to on a daily basis made my life there particularly sociable.

Driving to the field: trajectories of immersion in urban traffic

When I moved to Quarto Oggiaro at the end of September 2010, I arrived in the neighbourhood by car after a short drive from my hometown about 100 kilometres away, in the South of Lombardy, crossing Lombardy from South East to North West. Tracing and moving along the distance between my hometown and the field it is possible to situate my fieldwork arrival within a specific geometry of movements, distances and transitions. This is not necessarily a one way movement from one location to another but more like a continuous relational configuration where one can enter into the field from different positions, relations and means of transportation. The A1 highway, known as Autostrada del Sole, is one of the most important infrastructural connections in Italy. Built and planned in the post-war period, the Autostrada together with several other state-led initiatives (see Chapter 5 and 6 for an overview of this period in relation to the building of the Italian urban periferia) had the intention of boosting the Italian economy while also creating a physical and economic link between the industrial cities of the north with the rest of the country (Tarulli, 1973). Starting on the near Adriatic coast of the Italian peninsula, the A1 ends in Milan. Along this infrastructural system, a further subsystem is disclosed as small
factories and industrial sites, intermodal transport hubs and secondary roads expand along the Po valley. This system had an exponential growth in the last 60 years through the erosion of agricultural land and the expansion of an out of plan micro-industry. This is a conurbation bringing together the region ‘running’ between Turin and Venice, where Milan plays the role of the core and the heart (Turri 2000, Bonomi 2008). Here a system of infrastructural connections rule over the landscape where they facilitate the organisation of movement and multiple forms of transport between different urban and economic centres in the north of Italy. This system brings more than a million commuters into Milan every day and is commonly deemed core to its relative economic success.

Figure 4.1: Map of the Highways and the tangenziali within the Province of Milan and Monza. Image taken from: http://www.emmeti.it/Welcome/Strade/Lombardia/Milano/index.it.html (last accessed 31/10/2015)
At the point of exit from the A1 highway which gives access to Milan’s circular motorways, (a location outwith Milan’s administrative borders) is the locality of Melegnano, one of the 275 municipalities which comprise the province of Milan, a secondary administrative delimitation within the Italian state. From here, traffic enters and is inscribed upon the city through two circular motorways (Tangenziali) where one can decide to take one of the two branches which amorphously connect the city. To arrive in Quarto Oggiaro it is necessary to circumnavigate around the city and then, when the branch is about to end, re-enter the area through infrastructural networks. Passing through Milan’s hinterland towns and its suburban landscape, the view from the car windows is composed of an entanglement of different elements; logistic hubs, big shopping malls and large retail centres as well as marginal green areas, unauthorised community gardens, some self-constructed barracks, green parks and peripheral social housing blocks. These apparently juxtaposed functions and infrastructures comprise a discontinuous urban landscape. This has been defined as the ‘citta infinita’ (Bonomi and Abruzzese, 2004), the infinite city that surrounds Milan and which continues for kilometres along the main highway lines to Turin, Venice, Bologna and Switzerland. Quarto Oggiaro is positioned in the extreme opposite of this direction along the Tangenziale Ovest until it meets with the A4, technically another separate highway but practically operating as a third, northern branch of the two existing tangenziali14. It is here that the west and north trajectory crossing Milan connects with the highways in the direction of Turin to the West, the Swiss border to the North and Venice toward East. This is a central node of Italian road traffic and it is because of this strategic position that in the last 10 years the Fiera Milano (Milano Business Fair) and the World Expo 2015 area have been developed. Once one reaches the intersection with the Torino-Venezia highway, the first exit is Quarto Oggiaro and after a few roundabouts the road enters into a connection with the urban roads system of the neighbourhood. An experienced Milanese driver would be able to drive along this series of high traffic intersections with confidence and orientation. As a less experienced driver, unfamiliar with the quirks of the system, to learn and record this journey without the use

14 For this reason, it is also known as tangenziale nord
of GPS took me several attempts and despite the regular consultation of roadmaps I was
frequently caught in a series of mistaken exits and wrong turns.

This short journey from the A1’s exit to Quarto Oggiaro can last variable lengths of time,
from 20-30 minutes in the night with no traffic, to one or more hours in the morning or
evening, in line with the opening hours of offices and workplaces. Living in Quarto Oggiaro
and travelling regularly in and out of Milan, I had to adhere and adjust to these
temporalities. Understanding and pre-empting these movements was crucial for travelling
and thus connecting with places in Milan. Thinking about this journey opens up questions
regarding the kind of mobility that constitutes places in Northern Italy. Crossed by all of
the main highways and railways, this infrastructural system both constitutes and sustains
Milanese development, and proves fundamental for understanding how the city of Milan
has been constructed in its post-war period (see Chapter 6). At the same time, discussion
and debate over the expansion of the existing system have flourished in the last fifteen
years, especially during the recent wave of urban constructions in the city, which were
accelerated by the proposal of a new city plan and the Expo 2015 (see Chapter 8 for a
more detailed account of this period).

Understanding ‘the field’ as a place continually shaped by different practices (of/in
movements), the position of my own arrival became central to the other practices of
everyday commuting and transport which shape and compose the logic of place. My
arrival story is then to be understood as a trace of my movements, configured by repeated
exit and re-entry from the place where I designed my fieldwork. These journeys propose
different ways of knowing and arriving in Quarto Oggiaro. By introducing Quarto Oggiaro
through its connection to an infrastructural network of roads, rails and bridges, I seek to
unfold a specifically urban condition of entanglement between boundaries and
connections, which ultimately constitute place in Milan. Within this configuration, Quarto
Oggiaro provides a specific entanglement of movements, trajectories and infrastructures,
whereby direct engagements with the everyday organisation of relationships proves key
to understanding the ways in which connections and disconnections create place.
An ethnographic home: accommodation and dwelling in the field

Finding accommodation for fieldwork is never an ‘isolated’ task and can require attaining a level of acceptance within the community of people we aim to study. The task of finding accommodation requires different degrees of knowledge of a city, which means understanding its different areas and locations, and at the same time being able to discuss and evaluate the qualities of different properties. Pardo (1996) discusses this in relation to his fieldwork in Naples - how being accepted in the local, even in the urban context, can be an element of advantage in the search for accommodation. In addition, the still high levels of informality in the letting and subletting of a room in certain areas of Italy also privileges the maintenance of personal relations over access to properties (Pardo, 1996, p. 7). Also, renting a space for conducting fieldwork includes arrangements and relations of trust which are central in maintaining accommodation in a context that might not be entirely regulated through administrative and legal processes. In this process, the practice of house hunting can be explained by the unfolding of different relations informing the constitution of place. Temporalities, duration and different memories will be discussed as taking part in this composition. Sciama (2003) reflected on her Italian and Venetian identity when conducting her own fieldwork in the external Venetian Island of Burano. Localities, as they are recognised and embodied through our interlocutors in the field, are thus the central site for the reconfiguration of anthropological practices and the way we produce anthropological knowledge. Grasseni (2009) acknowledges how her decision to take up accommodation during her fieldwork in a ‘central’ town in a remote alpine valley facilitated an understanding of the commuting movements between the different surrounding villages and the existing mobilities of a broader area. Similarly, my decision to take up accommodation in the outskirts of Milan was necessary in order to position my understanding within the multiple forms of mobilities, connections and dis-connections which shape the Milanese periferia. Mobility in this sense shall be understood as a collection of fluxes, practices and process as well as administrative, political and technical forms of governance. In this way my own entanglement with movements in the field offers an opportunity to understand how different empirical categories and practices constitute place in an urban context.
During a visit for letting a room, different elements of knowledge are shared, reproduced and articulated: for how long is the space required, what financial support is available to the tenant and what are the motivations for the move? At the same time as different subjects will articulate their interests, aspirations and influence, the house owner or letting agent is expected to provide different degrees of information about the accommodation, its history and the way it is rented and managed. The house seeker is expected to be able to ensure the integrity of the house and feel confident in the paying of the rent. This exchange of information and capacities is central to understanding how property and ownership practices inform the composition of urban dwelling. In particular, through understanding the practices of enfielding operated by both anthropologists and interlocutors in the field we can explore the meaning of categories such as *periferia* (outskirts), *quartiere* (neighbourhood) and *città* (city) and how they articulate ideas of localism within the Quarto Oggiaro context. These categories act not just in terms of representation, ideology and discourse but as a practice, and are part of people’s everyday contexts. In my case, looking at how such categories were performed and constituted in Quarto Oggiaro I present the different practices that are central for obtaining, managing and sharing accommodation in Quarto Oggiaro and how these affect the spatial and temporal.

Having lived in Milan for several years by the time I started my fieldwork, I knew from experience how difficult it could be to find affordable and quiet accommodation in the city. Searching for a place to settle for my fieldwork, I was initially hoping for the support of my ethnographic interlocutors in the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro, and so in February 2010, several months in advance, I sent them an email requesting some suggestions and hopefully their assistance in helping me find local accommodation. Francesca and Guido, my main contacts, replied that they could not help me directly but they would share my request with other activists in the *Gronda Nord* Committee. This was the main group of activists I was aiming to work with during my fieldwork and they were based across different neighbourhoods in the north side of Milan. Even in this way it seemed that no one could help me in my request. In April 2010 when during a preliminary visit I met Francesca and told her I was still looking, I realised that my previous request had not been completely clear and the scope of my research needed to be explained again. As
the time for the start of my fieldwork was approaching, I decided other methods of ‘research’ were necessary to accomplish my mission of finding accommodation. This meant that, more appropriately for a non-‘Quarto Oggiarese’ (Quarto Oggiaro born) I had to start searching online room-sharing websites. This method, probably an ‘unconventional’ one for ethnographic fieldwork (and much more common for a student or a young city professional) at least revealed itself to be successful. It was in this way that within a few days, in early September 2010, I secured viewings of two shared flats in the neighbourhood and this was how I commenced my fieldwork. I would later discover that the misunderstandings regarding my arrival in the field and my need for accommodation were mainly connected to suspicions around my own practice of ‘residential research’. Several weeks after my arrival, during one of my first conversations with Gianni, a member of the No Gronda committee in Quarto Oggiaro, I was asked if the real reason for my staying in Milan was connected to professional commitments with local institutions and research organisations like the nearby Politecnico University of Architecture or the Municipality of Milan. It probably did not help that I had initially been introduced to many of my informants as a project manager for an urban development agency affiliated with the Province of Milan. After completing my MA dissertation in 2006 I was offered a collaboration with a development agency which lasted from 2007 to 2009. In this period I had met with people and discussed social and participatory projects in the neighbourhood as part of the European programme of Urban II, often in a supporting role to senior managers from the Province of Milan.

Here I seek to introduce my fieldwork as a residential practice, unfolding the account of how I approached and negotiated my engagement in the field, the different temporalities of a flat and the micro-relations which were therein contained, collected and entangled. Positioning the house within my broader ethnographic narrative and my everyday practices of research, the process of inhabiting a flat in the field can be better understood as a collaborative endeavour. There, different people share temporary and permanent ownership within the space and are involved in a series of agreement and potential disagreements. My own arrival in the field similarly involved such habitation negotiations. These consisted of both an empirical and a theoretical level, often interchanging, where my own way of dwelling for research in the field had to be redefined by the habits of my
flatmates, their friends and families. Such situations forced me also to unfold my own identification with the ideals of anthropology ‘at home’ and ‘away’ in Milan and whether these categories could actually be of any use to describe my situation.

The initial accommodation for my fieldwork was a large two bedroom flat in a former social housing tenement at the south-eastern border of Quarto Oggiaro. The owner’s son had put an advert on a website and arranged for me a visit to the house while I was still in the UK. When I arrived in Milan for the visit I met his father, a middle-aged smartly dressed man, who gently showed me the flat. I was explained that I would be sharing it with a young teacher of Polish origin whose Italian boyfriend lived in the neighbourhood. The apartment had been occupied by the owner’s family since its construction in the 1960s as social housing accommodation and was later acquired by the family from the municipality during the 1990s, then used as a house by his son for some years before he relocated to another city. The apartment was situated nearby a construction site at the core of the main planning controversy of my research, and this was central in my decision to visit the room in this particular block of flats. Francesca, one of my initial contacts in the No Gronda Nord committee also lived in the same block, and the house was directly exposed to the impact of the construction of the Gronda Nord road. While I was being shown the house I saw the advancement of the construction site for the Gronda through the windows. Noticing this, the owner kindly reassured me about the construction of the road and mentioned that he was not even sure if it would be successfully completed. In the living room within other furniture mainly from the 1960s, there was a long bookshelf, filled with original edition of both fiction and non-fiction books belonging to at least three generations of the family since the grandfather moved in with his wife in the 1960s. The books included an impressive collection of authors from the 1960s and 1970s, like Pasolini, Calvino, Fenoglio, engaged intellectual as well as left wing artists, involved in central debates around the nature of Italian democracy in post war times (see Chapter 5). The grandfather’s diplomas as a technical builder were still hanging on the walls, as well as the posters from the Triennale Museum of Design hung there by his nephew. I viewed these as the remnants of different generational dwelling practices that together could fit with my own attempts at trying to understand Milanese history. I was told that I could move unnecessary stuff in the basement downstairs, where I could also find a bike that I
could use. In the kitchen, a number of old cooking books and utensils were still in good use and belonged to the house. The modernistic atmosphere of the flat, its location next to the bigger construction site, its vintage furniture, as well as its strong connection with the history of the family that had been based there for half a century, convinced me of the convenience of the flat. The day after my visit I confirmed via email that I was interested in renting the room and would like to move in as soon as possible. Our arrangement was that the rent would be paid every month and the owner's uncle, who lived nearby, would collect this and make a handwritten receipt of our transaction which I had to sign. During his monthly visits, he often stopped for a coffee and I would enjoy practicing my skills in Milanese dialect, a tongue not too dissimilar from my native Cremonese. He was there to call upon if I needed any help with household maintenance and after some time we built up a kind of friendship, together fixing an old record player I had found in a cupboard, which I used to listen to the records the family had left behind.

Figure 4.2: The view from my window, October 2010, photo by Alessandro Froldi.
Figure 4.3: My initial fieldwork house in Via Concilio Vaticano II, view from the garden, October 2010, photo by Alessandro Froldi.

Figure 4.4: My initial fieldwork house in Via Concilio Vaticano II, detail, October 2010, photo by Alessandro Froldi.
The building complex was part of nine residential blocks of housing built in the 1960s after the INA-Casa programme (see Chapter 6 for a historical account and a map of the Concilio Vaticano II estate Fig 6.4, p. 106). The temporalities of this place were also connected with the exploration of the construction of the neighbourhood. The whole block had been sold during the 1990s by the municipality, with priority given to the previous residents. It was probably one of the most desired areas in Quarto Oggiaro for the houses were surrounded by gardens, and previously a large green area had divided these tenements from the industrial sites south of the neighbourhood. At the same time, shifts in the value of the house and the ownership created different kinds of residents in these blocks of housing. It is important to place the Gronda Nord project within this context. In 2008, after more than 20 years of contestations, the Gronda Nord road began to be constructed. Four large residential housing blocks faced directly onto the new road which lay less than 9 metres away from the building windows. There, an extensive bridge on the railway was intended to connect the new road with the north-east part of the city. In the southern part of the neighbourhood other major transformations occurred, radically
changing the ways in which Concilio Vaticano residents interacted with the place. The large site where the ‘Fina’ chemical refinery stood, which had used to provide work for many of the local residents as well as billowing out polluted emissions had been closed in the 1990s and then subjected to a regeneration during the early 2000s. That project had been led by a company called Euromilano that, by 2008, had built about 400 flats and a large park dividing the new residential area from the railway (see Chapters 8 and 11).

The housing estate also provided me with an interesting ethnographic scale for practising urban anthropology while understanding the intimate and everyday dynamics of the neighbourhood. Here I got to meet my informants on casual occasions, when coming back from their work or while going to local shops. Attached at the entrances of the housing blocks, I could see the posters and the calls for meetings that Francesca and the rest of the Concilio Vaticano Committee activists used to communicate to the rest of the residents. From my flat I could easily track the progress of the construction site, hear the drilling, and yelling of the workers and noises of the trucks transporting construction materials. This condition was not just about the rhetoric of ‘being there’ but conceived as a way of positioning my work. During the time of my stay in this house my neighbour and informant Francesca would visit me regularly to talk about my research while helping me in making contact with other activists. Often she invited me to her place when she was meeting with other activists to enable me to conduct interviews with other inhabitants of the Concilio Vaticano housing complex. At the same time the more I developed my knowledge about this controversy, the more I was told that this contestation was nearing its conclusion and the possibility for my participant observation was limited to a few opportunities. In this context the house provided me with a different approach to understanding activism as part of the everyday experience of dwelling in a suburban neighbourhood.

In the course of my fieldwork, the proximity between my flat and the construction site provided the background for my everyday movements across the neighbourhood. Walks, observations and documentations of the construction site and its transformations required just a few steps across the common garden of my tenement, where through a pedestrian
exit I had direct entrance to the construction site in Via De Pisis (see Figure 4.5). The proximity between my house and the construction site is not to be understood as a mere observational resource. Instead this condition was at the core of what the committee in Quarto Oggiaro was contesting, for it essentially affected their personal and social ways of dwelling in the neighbourhood. Their practices of contestation can be seen in this way as primarily connected with their own experience of living, working or passing through the neighbourhood. I will further explore my research activities connected to this contestation in the second part of the thesis (see Chapters 8, 10 and 11).

The everyday life of anthropological places: making a fieldwork routine

In this section I explore the centrality of practices of movement and mobility within anthropological research for creating a routine and thus a practice of the field. Understanding fieldwork as constituting a series of routines, practices of sharing, collaborations and co-production of knowledge I aim to unfold the empirical and everyday dimension that constitutes anthropological places. I argue that it is through interweaving the practical engagement with everyday life that fieldwork becomes a relevant dimension for positioning theoretical questions. Anthropological fieldwork provides the ethnographer with a lived context in which to position and build the lived experience as well as theoretical, methodological and ethical questions. The forms of dwelling that I have encountered, learned of and practiced in the field can be thought of together with taking part in forms of everyday life in the field. In this way, everyday life and activism can be viewed as “implicated in the making of places” (Pink (2012, p. 6). Inspired by such an approach, in this section I discuss how forms of activism as well as my own way of researching life in Quarto Oggiaro actually took part in the everyday experience of places in the neighbourhood.

During the period of my fieldwork I organised about 30 interviews with members of committees related to the contestation of the Gronda Nord. Most of these interviews were conducted in the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro and its surrounding areas, but in some
cases a longer journey from one side of the city to the other was required. Going by bike to most of these meetings I started to learn different paths and bike friendly streets. Regularly taking my camera with me, I would also try to prepare for interviews by exploring the area by myself beforehand, taking pictures and recording my impression of the context. In general as the organisation of regular public meetings within these committees was suspended or almost abandoned, I found it impossible to engage in proper activities of participation with these protests groups. However, this gave me more time to prepare for interviews with key members of the Gronda Nord committee, and engage with other groups active in the area of Quarto Oggiaro. It is there that I often met members of the committee who, similarly to me, were engaged in several voluntary activities. It is within this social context that I learned more about the meaning of taking part in the social and political life of the neighbourhood. I paid particular attention to the different scales at which local politics were played and represented in the neighbourhood. My role as researcher ultimately provided me with a mediator role between different subjects and social groups. I could easily be informed of neighbourhood visits from councillors of the municipality of Milan, politicians or journalists. My freedom to organise my everyday activities following these interests also provided me with a great opportunity to connect with and bring together groups that otherwise could have experienced difficulty meeting to exchange information and ideas.

My fieldwork routine was not very different from the one experienced by many other neighbourhood residents. Typically in the morning I would have breakfast in a nearby coffee bar on Lessona Street or De Roberto Street. There I would read the newspaper, listen to the conversations of other passers-by and have a quick chat with acquaintances. The world I could see through the cafe windows, while having breakfast or sitting at the outside tables, was no longer the quartiere dormitorio (the sleeping neighbourhood) designed in the 1960s for factory working families, but a mixed, multicultural and lively neighbourhood. From early morning it was host to many commercial activities, social relations and interactions. In the evening, several grassroots, commercial and institutional spaces offered activities, discussions and some entertainment. These activities, and the places where they were based, were of a radically different nature from the artistic, commercial and fashionable environment where Milan’s financial, commercial and
creative class would most likely spend their evenings. This was in part justified by the adjacency between Quarto Oggiaro and the areas external to the city of Milan and which, even if completely surrounded by its development still offered a viable alternative to the busy rhythm of the city centre. The difference between the centre and the *periferia* in Milan is thus quite easily understood through the embodiment of everyday activities and the different tempos at which they are performed. The nearby neighbourhoods of Bovisa, Certosa and Sempione, located more toward the city centre, also offered a flavour of Milan’s nightlife and often I would join some of the youths from Quarto Oggiaro’s social centre to explore what these areas offered. I would be conscious that the lack of a quick metro connection and absence of a late night suburban train would highly curtail our movements in the North West area of the city, but we could easily return to *Quarto* (as the youths would colloquially refer to Quarto Oggiaro) by bus or car.

It was by joining and actively engaging with different generations of activists and residents in Quarto Oggiaro that I could better understand the composition of the population of Quarto Oggiaro and its similarities with other areas of what Foot (2001) defines as new *periferia* areas in Milan. If instead of moving from the outskirts to the centre, we were indeed to follow the circular buses running along the more external area it was possible to cross the different neighbourhoods composing the Milanese *periferia* with its large social housing estates and new private residential and commercial developments. It was there that the *Gronda Nord* was planned or partially implemented. A strong element of continuity within those areas was to be found in the populations of the *periferia*. From statistics, Quarto Oggiaro is an area characterised by higher percentages of unemployed, aged and retired people compared to the average in the city centre of Milan\(^\text{15}\). At the same time, it is also clear that discrepancies between the *periferia* and the centre are not just based on their relative developments, but ultimately in the conceptions of ‘city’ on which they are based. Quarto Oggiaro in this sense remained a neighbourhood still partly attached to ideas of modernity and progressive development created in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Then the expansion of the city outside of the centre was conceived to house

\(^{15}\) From the 2001 census data, Quarto Oggiaro had 5.2% Unemployed (Milan 2.9), Retired 26.6% (Milan 24.3), and Occupied 41.1% (Milan 47.8). Cited in Torri and Vitale (2009), p. 65.
newly-arrived immigrants from the countryside or South of Italy who established their lives in the freshly-built, state-financed social housing program.

A reminder of this wave of immigration is still evident when one walks today in the neighbourhood. A mix of dialects, words and accents from Naples, Sicily and Calabria is fused into old and new Milanese slang and many of my informants actually considered the resulting mix as the unique Quarto Oggiaro`s ways of talking. In the 1990s, another wave of immigration from China, Egypt and India further impacted upon the social composition of the Milanese *periferia*, but as Foot (2001) had observed, a proper response from the institutions in this case was not put in place. The housing provision for the new Milanese inhabitants was left mainly in the care of private landlords, leaving few spaces available for new applicants to the social housing scheme. In the context of growing demand for cheap housing, places like Quarto Oggiaro offered new immigrant generations an environment in which to integrate with Milanese and Italian society (Foot, 2001; Torri and Vitale, 2009). This integration did not often result in an easy experience for incoming residents, but open, community spaces, such as the youth social centre, certainly provided a vital resource as they provided a volunteer-run Italian School and other social or sporting activities. Concurrently, tensions between communities, similarly found in other Italian places facing the same insurgence of immigrants, were not uncommon. Prejudices and misperceptions could easily be found in the neighbourhood and they could be connected with broader tensions within Italian society associated with the challenges of dealing with multi-cultural integration. However, from the perspective of many activists from Quarto Oggiaro I spoke with, the majority of these tensions lay between new and old residents more than between native Italians and immigrants.

Conducting most of my shopping in the neighbourhood provided me with plenty of opportunities to observe how these contrasting practices of dwelling were managed. Three days a week, an open air market was taking place across a number of neighbourhood streets, where one would find generally consumable products such as vegetables, clothes, home accessories and furniture. Manning these stalls were often newly arrived migrants, who would find occasional jobs as assistant vendors in the market, frequently without formal contracts or personal insurance. They would try to sell
their products without a licence in the streets, ready to run and hide if the police arrived. Authorised stalls with licences sold specialist products such as Indian carpets, Sicilian pastries, Calabrese food or Neapolitan music CDs or cassettes, thus offering national and international migrant communities a sensory connection with their home communities through ethnic and regional consumption. While the open market, with its reduced prices, managed to maintain its popularity, normal shops in the neighbourhood struggled. In the last 20 years, following the opening of a shopping mall and two large supermarkets, the commercial environment of Quarto Oggiaro changed. Several local, family-run independent shops were forced to close or move elsewhere, thus ending or tangibly altering a network of everyday relations and connections within the population. This is also in evidence when visiting the city market in de Roberto Street, a structure built in the 1960s to host an everyday market, which is now reduced to only a few shops. Some immigrant-run shops have opened to fill these spaces instead, providing services such as halal butchers, Internet cafes and international telephone shops, as well as some Chinese import stores. With some notable exceptions, most of the coffee shops in the neighbourhood are still run by Italian families, but some are now owned by Chinese families. These shops, where a caffè espresso would still cost no more than 0.80 cents, are often open from early morning until 8 or 9 PM and manage to provide an important element of attraction for many immigrants living in the neighbourhood as well as local Italian customers.

Political activities were also present in the neighbourhood’s public spaces and provided me with significant interactions and opportunities to meet and discuss activists’ activities. This was particularly true in the months preceding elections. Most political parties would set up stalls where activists could leaflet and encourage people to vote for their party. Similarly, outwith these times, activist groups and committees would use the market as a place to share information, petitions and invite local citizens to join their activities. The branches of political parties such as the Partito Democratico (PD) and Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) also offered unlimited spaces to the discussion and organisation of politics, and provided recreational spaces (see Chapter 10). Some of them, like the PD local branch, even had a coffee shop where a youth group organised a weekly night with live music, food and drinks. Grassroots associations often mixed during these social
activities as well as running their own spaces within the neighbourhood. The association *Quarto Oggiaro Vivibile* had been running for more than 20 years in one large area of the *Vivaio Park*, which provided a coffee bar, sports facilities and a summer school for local children. They also supported annual celebrations like *Carnevale*, *Ferragosto* and *Primavera* where large numbers of inhabitants would take part. Joining in with their activities myself I directly experienced how difficult and often stressful co-ordinating all the different groups and institutions could be. In the nearby park, recent restoration of the *Villa Scheibler* offered another space for local grassroots associations to meet and organise events, institutionally supported by the *Comune di Milano* or the *Consiglio di Zona 8* (local council). Many residents involved with supporting and running the activities of the villa complained about the difficulties and a lack of response or support from the Municipality. There would often be long delays in restoration work and limited access to its spaces.

Four Catholic churches were also part of the neighbourhood fabric, and they provided facilities such as sport fields, coffee spaces, meeting rooms and often ran several community activities. The Catholic NGO ACLI were working in *Piazza Capuana* to develop a recently renovated space where children’s activities and support to families were provided, together with a strategic service planning conducted with the Municipality of Milan and the Lombardy Region. In the course of my fieldwork I happily engaged in several of the activities promoted within the neighbourhood by the aforementioned groups. There I learnt about the challenges, skills and forms of knowledge produced by a large number of local volunteers supported by a small number of social workers. On one occasion I took part in a photography and video course sponsored by ACLI where several residents were required to work together for a documentary about the neighbourhood. During this experience I not only managed to develop my technique and access some of the tools available, but I was suitably placed to observe how other residents, both young and old, attempted to represent and document their reality through the camera. When supporting other residents attending this course, I managed to assist with conducting interviews and filming locations in the neighbourhood, in the process learning about its history and its previous populations. Again, even if these experiences are not directly presented in this thesis, they certainly informed my confidence and my
ability to discuss with activists about their perception of planning controversies and how Quarto Oggiaro had been changing in the past decades.

Other places which constituted part of my everyday life were the local library in Quarto Oggiaro or the library nearby in the Villa Litta Modigliani Park. There I read or transcribed interviews and field notes, often consulting texts and documents on the history of Milan. These places also constituted a resource for collecting information about events and cultural, political and educational activities taking place in the neighbourhood as well as in the city. The libraries, as part of a municipality network, operated a set of shared and interconnected services and activities but were also enabled by detached councils supporting local initiatives and projects at a neighbourhood level, which kept libraries well-stocked with information about public talks and presentations or leaflets and posters about institutionally-promoted social and cultural projects. In some cases these activities were relevant to my thesis or simply of interest to my interlocutors and therefore constituted elements of further discussion during interviews as well as in my everyday interactions in the field. Between locating myself in these places, and moving from one location to another, this incurred chance meetings and frequent opportunities to build relationships with local residents, which helped me to gain an understanding of the different forms of everyday engagement with places. Cycling or walking, I often stopped in one of the community gardens where I occasionally volunteered, either in Quarto Oggiaro’s Vivaio Park or the nearby Parco Pini Park. There I interacted with volunteers with whom I could have general discussions on topics from everyday life to politics and spreading the word about local events. Following a traditional Italian routine, I would then sometimes return to my flat for lunch; otherwise I would continue my daily routine in the neighbourhood or outside of it. Often I travelled to the city centre where bigger libraries, shops and universities would provide both meeting places and study rooms. These same places also represented an opportunity to engage with students groups or the extra-parliamentary, autonomous left, historically active in the State University of Milan, both of whom frequently organised other political activities. In evenings, back in Quarto Oggiaro, I often attended meetings organised by local groups, cultural associations and committees with whom I was in contact. These were groups usually directly involved in planning contestations or cultural associations where I decided to be involved for the
period of my fieldwork. For example, from my arrival in the field I volunteered once a week as an Italian teacher in a self-organised school for immigrants based in a youth centre in Quarto Oggiaro. Later I became more involved in organising the weekly assembly of the youth association which ran the municipality space where the school was hosted. Through all these interactions, I quickly became entrenched in their activities and with the management of their space. My involvement in this youth group made it easier for me to make contact with the rest of the associations and committees operating in the neighbourhood and I became a recognised figure within these networks. I also attended the monthly meeting of a food co-operative group with whom I was involved, and attended meetings of a group of activists working for the self-management of a grassroots space within Villa Sheibler in the Quarto Oggiaro Park.

In addition to these physical localities, meeting spaces and activities comprising and shaping my routine there were also a series of virtual, digital and online resources which proved central to the shaping of my daily trajectories and movements. Unequipped with a smartphone at the time of my fieldwork, I checked my emails and updated social network websites at home or in the libraries. Through these online resources I kept up-to-date with grassroots protests organised by communities, students or other political groups. Often I would read of sit-ins, evictions or presentations which I would then attend. Finally, the establishment of a daily evening run in the park eventually began to provide me with further opportunity to meet other interlocutors of my research, friends and inhabitants of Quarto Oggiaro who were at work or busy elsewhere during the day. All these activities and interactions provided me with a lived experience of my fieldwork. It is within this experience and through it, that my understanding of planning controversies can be intended as positioned in practice and in place. For my fieldwork, I was not merely dedicated to the collection of data through formal interviews and occasional meetings, but became involved in an everyday constitution of anthropological place. In this way I could interweave different situations together and be able to position different practices in their everyday aspects involving people and places. In all these situations I could not only meet members of committees against the Gronda Nord and other activists directly involved in protests against planning and construction site, but also learn about the projects, visions and imaginations which actually constituted a central part of my interlocutors’ practices.
In these contexts, politics, both at local and national levels, were discussed and imagined. From this I gained the insights of young people, elderly residents, local politicians and experienced activists, and was able to discuss both my research interests and draw out their opinions on disparate topics. It was ultimately by positioning a construction site protest within this configuration of local politics, planning culture and activism that my own construction of the field took place.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided a development of my approach to fieldwork and I have discussed it both with reference to theories of place as well as to how these influence the ways in which we inhabit and dwell even while engaged in the act of conducting research. In particular I have presented the practice of arrival and of finding accommodation in the field as relational endeavours, capable of disclosing the multiple connections and disconnection constituting places. By providing a series of introductory ethnographic accounts, I positioned my methodology within my experience of fieldwork in Milan and argued that anthropological places are the result of mutual engagement between the anthropologist and interlocutors in the field. In this way, my own research routing in the field is presented as part of a practice of getting to know how people learn how to inhabits and organise their everyday life in Quarto Oggiaro. The relations between researchers and their informants, and the forms of sociality thought which these are experienced are central to understanding this methodological approach. Fieldwork experiences in this sense provided a place for discussing and developing theory in the field.
Chapter 5: In and out of place, anthropology, planning and contesting the state in post-war urban Italy

In this chapter, I outline the ambiguities and tensions accompanying the emergence of Italian state from the post-WWII period to the early 2000s. I aim to rethink ideas of modernity in these contexts in light of the anthropological literature which brought together ideas of bureaucracy, localism and clientelism. This framework aims to outline intellectual debate over ideas of modernity in relation to urban, social and political transformations in Italy. I propose how the anthropology of Italian urban places can learn from considering the closely interlinked relationship between planning, politics and social movement.

Italian anthropology and its discontents

Anthropological research, in Italy, the USA and the United Kingdom, provides a compelling framework for interpreting the formation of Italy as a complex nation state, crossed with tensions and ambiguities. A look at how these elements of unease are reflected within both Italian and Anglo-American literatures thus facilitates a space to consider the ways in which Italian places are constituted. I aim to focus in particular on the status of urban places and how they are conceptualised and explored as historical and socio-political entities. By this method I intend to trace the ambiguities in the emergence of ideas of the state and modernity in relation to urban, social and political transformations within the second half of the 20th Century.

Since the 1920s the anthropology of southern Italy, particularly in more rural and isolated areas, has often been a preferred research location for British and American anthropologists in Southern Europe (Allegro, 2011). It may therefore be surprising to some that there have been no introductory texts published on the anthropology of Italy in either Italian or English. Across these initial decades of studies, and until the late 1980s, Italian anthropological studies remained strongly associated with the concept of honour.
and shame as distinct elements in the study of the Mediterranean area as well as with ideas of political systems based on clientelism and patronage. The failure of the Mediterranean paradigm of study as an anthropological area was discussed in the course of the 1980s (Herzfeld 1987, 1997, Goddard, Llobera and Shore, 1996) and later in the 1990s critical reviews of the field of anthropological studies in Italy emerged which proposed there was scope for new approaches and objects of studies (Kenny and Kertzer, 1983, Paolucci 1996, Kertzer 1997). The Mediterranean paradigm had for too long kept European contexts within a sort of “categorical confusion” (Herzfeld, 1987, p.15) that positioned “otherness in the self” (Herzfeld, 1987, p.15). Under this ideology of otherness, the opposed histories of anthropology and folklore maintained a symbolic division defining not simply disciplinary and epistemological autonomy but a foregrounding to the emergence of modern European states (Herzfeld, 1987, p.7). Contained in such circumstances, the division between what some deem ‘proper’ anthropology in foreign, exotic locations as opposed to the admittedly more minor tradition of folklore studies at home has to be understood not just as a disciplinary categorisation but as an attempt to both silence and displace internal otherness and alterity as “matter out of place” (p.15). It is because of this ambiguity that the anthropology of the Mediterranean has viewed Italy through a series of paradigms reproducing a backward, folkloric and exotic perspective (Kenny and Kertzer, 1983, Kertzer 1997).

At the University of Milan in 1954, a national congress was called to launch a manifesto for Italian cultural anthropology. This project was set in contrast with the former colonialist tradition of Italian ethnology sponsored by the fascist regime. In order to distance itself from this position, the new Italian cultural anthropology manifesto proposed to focus on contemporary society and its transformation, both at home and abroad (Allegro 2011). While this manifesto clearly supported the establishment of a modern project for anthropology in Italy, it only partially maintained the ambition of questioning social changes and transformations at home. Researchers in Italy still mainly focused their fieldwork locations outside of urban contexts thus avoiding modern and industrialised parts in the north of the country (Kertzer 1990). An example can be seen in how Milan, where the impact of post-war transformation had been particularly strong, was consistently overlooked as a fieldwork location by anthropologists emerging from this
manifesto, and also by their British and North American counterparts until the 1980s. It was due to this lack of direct research that the urban transformations and social movements which soon emerged from the northern Italian cities did not garner much interest from the first generation of academic anthropologists, but were instead left for the studies of sociologists, historians and political scientists. Italian anthropologists emerging from this post-war manifesto were not the only ones to blame for a lack of attention toward certain elements of Italian cities and societies. Reflecting on the conflicted histories of Italian and Anglo-American anthropology in Italy, the relationship between anthropology and the birth of European modern states can be retraced and brought back into focus. This relationship is a “looking-glass” approach that reflects ideological tensions and pressures (Herzfeld, 1987, p.15), which facilitates the re-discussion of anthropology national histories within a broader intellectual context and aids the rethinking of categories of state within European traditions. It is along this line of investigation that Italian anthropology can offer a valuable reflection over the redefinition of the state and its relationship with both practices and regimes of planning, politics and social movements.

Ideas of localism and parochialism are crucial for understanding the tensions between the state and the field of Italian politics. Looking at the literature on these topics we see that this issue is central for shaping the relationship between Italian places and the ambiguities of the modern Italian state. Anthropological literature focusing on those issues has demonstrated the existence of a series of hierarchies of power between localities and centres, where the former tend to be imagined as dependant and passive (Pratt, 1980). This localist ideology can be further examined as part of a set of broader practices of clientelism within the political sphere. Bonding local interests to the central state, both localism and clientelism tie together multiple social threads (Lytteleton, 1996, p.45). A useful move to question the understanding of “locality” in Italy as a hegemonic construction of the political elites is the one advocated by Stacul (2003). This redefinition of locality as a category of political engagement is interpreted as “neo-localism” (Stacul, 2006, p.137), a process of political and social interaction between a community and its environment as a dimension of their sociality with their “total social environment” (p.173). This approach does not disconnect the practices of localities from the political discourses which stem from them. On the contrary, he considers the changes in the Italian political
context in the 1990s and argues that localism has changed its political articulation: from being partly informed by national and urban sentiments and values, it has become the expression of a society in which the state has reduced its influence on the economy and consequently on everyday life.

Together with localism and clientelism, corruption is another element that must be understood in order to uncover the multiple articulations of Italian politics between different scales. Corruption acts thus as a tool of mediation and a practice of imagination from where places are articulated within everyday life (Schneider and Schneider, 2003; Herzfeld, 2006). Certain sectors in particular, including the construction industry, had been suspected of running the gauntlet of the mafia for money laundering (riciclaggio, ‘recycling’) “through a rapid sequence of real estate sales, often by powerful underworld Bosses” (Herzfeld 2006, p.137). More recently, Heller and Shore (2005) argued that the pervasiveness and fascination with corruption and its narratives should merit closer anthropological investigation (p.6). For them, “what makes corruption such an interesting object of study is not so much the ‘reality’ of its existence as the fact that it is widely believed to exist, the complex narratives that enfold it, and the new relationships and objects of study that those narratives create” (p.7). In this sense, the parallel between corruption, clientelism and localism emerges in the way they promote exchanges and multi-stranded relationships for connecting individuals with the state. These processes can be considered as an element for a more human negotiation, and a tool for distorting existing priorities, for they increase practices of exploitation and inequality while promoting further uncertainty (Heller and Shore, 2005, p.7).

In the context of my research, these phenomena are relevant for both the study of planning and political regimes and of social movement studies, as they provide a connection with how practices of bureaucracy are often perceived and contested in the context of the modern state. Herzfeld proposed to resist the “false (and self-congratulatory) allure of the high-modernist creed” by “paying closer attention to the spatial organisation of the moral lives of citizens” (Herzfeld 2009, p.158). Ultimately “the internal logic of European national bureaucracy” (…) “represents cultural unities as social units” (Ibid). These are maintained by “distinguishing between insiders and outsiders” and
“representing these distinctions as given in nature - as matters of essence rather than of cultural or historical contingency (ibid)”. It is through the realm of everyday practice that the system of categories “founded in social experience” can be reconverted and this enables the definition of the boundary between insiders and outsiders to be seen as one which is continuously negotiated and not fixed in terms of its distinction from the official rhetoric it is derived (Herzfeld 1992, p.174). This is ultimately a condition for emplacing the role of corruption and its accusations as indicators of the strength of social relations in a context where the official ideology rejects these practices and social actors resentfully condemn them, yet “neither can practically manage without” (p.173). A better perspective from where to understand this opposition is proposed with the idea of them coming through as, a “looking glass” (Hertzfeld, 1987, p.15), an in-between space that intercept the trajectories and the tensions of the state. Ultimately, it is from this angle that we can contribute in reconnecting these literatures with a structural rethinking of Italian social movements and the fields of planning, politics and modernity that they aim to contest.

The birth of the Italian periferia: planning politics, modernity and the state

The relationship between Italian local politics and urban development requires an understanding of both the formation and composition of political elites, as well as of the articulation of influences from different lobbies and economic actors. In the course of chapters 6 and 8 I explore in detail the historical developments of planning practices in relation to social movements and political transformations. Here, introducing those arguments I claim that Italian planning and architecture is rooted in a series of ambiguities, conflicts and tensions which hinder its development from the post-war era until the present day. From this perspective, Milan offers the case study of a city from where both the practices of planning and political engagement can be conveniently traced in order to unfold the tensions underlying ideas of modernity and state in Italy. Foot (2001) recognised the idea of the ‘economic miracle’ of the city as central to the narrative of Milan’s urban development in the 19th century. During this period, the city became an industrial and financial centre, experiencing high levels of immigration from the poorest
parts of the country. The Milanese economic miracle is thus at the centre of large scale transformations in Italian society as well as in the urban landscape of the city, which resulted in the doubling of its size and population over the course of the two post-war decades. The interplay between planning and politics is also part of the debates and contestations emerging from city planning legislation, its history and evaluation. The political and economic interactions in the urban development process in Milan are thus directly connected to the attempts made to alter the process and the consequences of the ways in which capitalism operates on the ground (Moloch and Vicari, 1990, p. 603). Campos Venuti (et al; 1986), Oliva (2002) and Boatti (2007), have all attempted to build a historical narrative of planning in the city of Milan around the launch of the master plans between their commitments and the professional community of planners and architects. In their accounts, politics and the role of civil society, intellectuals, and political parties are never fully detached or hidden from the configuration of the master plans. Rather to the contrary, they acknowledge the political and ethical dimension played by planning in relation to different social groups. This literature is also relevant for the scope of this research, as it has often been carried out in direct connection with the planning and the transformation of the city in the last century. At the same time a smaller-scale approach to the city could be a useful starting point for examining Italian urban places and their composition.

Exploring the debate leading to a development of the concept of quartiere can help when rethinking the ideas of modernity in post-war architecture, urban planning and reconstruction in Italy. This programme indicated in the scale of the quartiere (neighbourhood) as a laboratory of intervention for the reconstruction of Italian society. The quartiere was not simply a scale of urban reconstruction after the war but a “social unity, an educative environment for community life for citizens” (Di Biagi 2001, p.20 - my translation). In an essay on the development of Italian design and architecture, Penny Sparkle (1990) argues that both the debate and architectural solutions of the post-war reconstruction in Milan can be framed as an attempt to solve the issue of homelessness and as such, were aimed at “combining democracy and housing on Italian soil” (p.227). The models for these utopian neighbourhoods were initially indicated in the British garden cities and American greenbelts (Astrengo 1949, cited in Di Biagi p.21). Manuals and
national standards were developed in order to scale these ideals at a neighbourhood level which partially adhered to the international trends of architectural modernism previously exposed at the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne. In Italy, this trend developed beyond rationalism toward ideas of organicism in architecture (Di Biagi p. 23). Di Biagi analysis of this theory of architecture shows how the opposition between building and dwelling is conceptualised: the unità abitativa (dwelling unit) is conceptualised in these manuals as a whole building environment whilst simultaneously understood as a cell of a broader organism. In the unfolding of the relationship between the unità abitativa and the neighbourhood, a series of identities, values and forms of sociality emerge. These are indicated as the distinction of citizenship, and foster a sense of community by promoting good neighbourhood relations, or “vicinato” (Di Biagi p.23). This is a definition that resonates with the anthropological understanding of an Italian quartiere as an “ego-centred group, the members of which live in the same area” (Davis 1975, p.66). This way of looking at the emergence of planned neighbourhood in the decades between the 1950s and 1960s in Italy thus provides a useful scale at which to consider the city. The category of “quartiere” should be seen not as a pre-analytical assumption but always as the result of historical and political negotiations between politics and urban regimes.

One way of connecting the category of quartiere to the historical and political trajectories that informed its constitution involves tracing how those urban neighbourhoods evolved beyond the local scale and charting its development across different periods of time. The context of Italian periferia – outskirts - provides a useful tool for placing Italian politics and planning within such a perspective. The category of Italian “periferia”, indicates what is distant and outside the core of the city, but also describes a certain urban landscape often associated with bleak modern housing estates. Foot (2001) acknowledged how in the years between the 1960s and 1980s, Italian social scientists, journalists, artists and filmmakers forged the idea of the traditional working class periferia as an “atavistic” community, an “ideal” of solidarity and harmony that was probably never entirely accurate. Foot (2001) indicates how this romantic vision became attached to a certain kind of periferia, the “old” periferia, in traditionally working class areas which developed at the end of the 18th Century before the city’s expansion. During the 1970s, the old periferia was nostalgically romanticised; but at the same time a process of another nature was
taking place in new periferia built in the 1950s and the 1960s where the largest part of the population lived. This periferia, more external and isolated in the public debate, began to be referred to as the ghetto, an abandoned and marginalised non-city. There, crime and social degradation were described as “chronic” and the crises of these parts of the city were usually portrayed in parallel with the crises of the Italian political and economic system.

In the 1980s the newly-funded archive for ethnographic research of the Lombardy region provided the first anthropological exploration of the Milanese periferia (Della Peruta et al, 1985). A team of photographers, artists, anthropologists and planners attempted to bridge Italian scholarship on folklore with a more anthropological approach, and also brought in recent developments of semiotics and cultural studies. Issues of class, youth and identity were used in order to understand Italian political life and urban culture. Natali (1985), explored interesting areas of contamination between political art and photography which linked with the emergence of radical urban political movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Meazza (1985) focused on particular neighbourhoods which had undergone rapid development during the post-war period as a result of a massive wave of immigration from the countryside and further in the south of Italy. The tensions and conflicts embodied by working class kids and teenagers living in the Milanese periferia of Quarto Oggiaro were examined by Meazza (1985) as performances, or even rituals of resistance, during the celebration for the “Carnevale”. Quarto Oggiaro is one of the largest working class neighbourhoods in the north-west of the city and where processes of stigmatisation due to criminality and social inequality have been mostly reported. In their study of Carnevale in Quarto Oggiaro the authors, a photographer and an ethnographer, examined the counter position between official celebrations in the centre of Milan and spontaneous, working class performances in the outskirts. Carnevale is a period connected to both religious and secular historical traditions, similarly to Halloween, where the use of masks and fancy dress conceals people’s identities. In Milan, the official celebrations are usually held in the main Cathedral Square but these are also accompanied by informal celebrations conducted across different parts of the city by young people. Looking at teenagers’ informal celebrations in Quarto Oggiaro, Meazza (1985) set himself the task of understanding the different social forms and ways of inhabiting the periferia from the
perspective of visual and semiotic analysis. While this provided a refreshing and original contribution to the field of urban anthropology in Italy and was also the first attempt to focus on Milan’s urban context, one of the main limitations of this approach can be connected with the danger of transforming anthropology’s object into a representation of difference, otherness and marginality. Scianna, Scifo and Navoni’s (1985) photographs of working class children and adolescents, which were discussed by Meazza (1985), while certainly engaged in an original, interdisciplinary approach, still tended to depict a distance which earlier Italian and Anglo-American anthropology had also applied to rural and southern subjects as indicative proof of their subjects’ backward beliefs steeped in folklore. This can be better understood in reference to how the distance between the photographer and their subject was reproduced within this experience. The *periferia* is still maintained as an exotic site ‘uneducated’ to the photographer’s attentions. Working-class culture and its representation within this project, even if researched following a framework of resistance to the centre and to modernity, is still considered through a distanciating lens where the inhabitants of this place could be imagined as radically different from the more pacified ways of life promoted by institutions and the Italian Government in the post war period. In order to thus readdress this element in the understanding of Quarto Oggiaro as well as the Milanese *periferia* as an anthropological place I propose to rethink the ways through which we can compose forms of collaborative knowledge. Discussing the history of the anthropology of Italy and presenting some of the original contributions that Italian anthropologists have provided to this field I have also aimed to show the potentials of this area of study. In the next section I will further discuss how these approaches can be positioned and how they contributed to a different understanding of Italian politics and the relevant transformation of its urban, political, social and economic landscape.

**Contesting the state: Italian social movements, planning and the crisis of modernity**
Looking at the practices of contestations and protests in Italy I aim to expand discussion which reflects upon the relationship between planning and the state, and indeed the logic of modernity in an Italian context. This is a perspective from where not just ideas of modernity and state are contested but are also continually re-articulated in the ways in which we think of and imagine cities. The history of Milan is useful in this sense for revealing how social movements have established specific logics, practices and trajectories within the urban realm. Protests, political conflicts and demonstrations in tandem with forms of activism and social movements have shaped both the history of the city of Milan as well as the literatures through which contemporary social movements studies emerged and expanded as a discipline. An example of this is given by looking at social movements emerging in Italy in the 1960s and how they produced both a theoretical and methodological revision of the meaning of protests and dissent within the recent history of Italian democracy.

During the 1960s in larger Italian cities, a broader protest cycle emerged from the universities which expanded towards the factories and urban neighbourhoods (Tarrow 1990, Lumely 1990, Della Porta 1996, 1999). Tarrow (1989) analyses protest politics in Italy between 1965 and 1975 as dominated by a new wave of social movements and positions. This wave occurred both within Italy and broadly across Western democracies (p.1). For Milan, and also for many cities in more industrialised areas, this was a time of social and political turmoil which characterised a period that later became known as the Italian “long 68” (Lumely 1990). This wave of protest, starting in the mid-1960s grew both locally and nationally in the course of the 1970s, addressing as it did, a need for broadening the democratic participation in the workplace and beyond (Della Porta 1999, p.217). A key element for understanding this period is connected with the partial interruption of the national and political programmes that supported social ambitions in the post war reconstruction period. One consequence of this was the collapse of the national social housing program INA-CASA, which planned and built large neighbourhoods across Italy during the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1960s, economic crisis brought an end to this initiative and several planned interventions remained unfinished, which negatively impacted upon the quality of public spaces in new neighbourhoods (Ginsborg 1988). In this context, a new generation of urban planners...
began to criticise the system of growing inequality in the redistribution of the profits created by land-ownership and development (Indovina et al. 1974). In Milan and other cities, this debate, facilitated by the politicisation of students and universities, also involved a critique of the ways in which master plans of the city had been implemented, for these often promoted financial speculation, clientelism and corruption (Campos Venuti et al., 1986; Oliva, 2002; Boatti, 2007). Essentially, this wave of protests which culminated in 1968 is viewed by authors belonging to the SMS School of thought (for more on this matter, please see chapter 2) such as Tarrow (1989), as a contributing factor to the development of Italian democracy, ultimately resulting in its modernity. In contrast to my thesis, Balestrini and Moroni (1997), who focused more on protests culminating during the 1970s, claimed that these protests should be interpreted as an effort to elaborate an alternative conception of modernity altogether, indeed as an inversion or subversion (rovesciamento) of the dominant model of development. These authors clearly recognised the failure of this inversion, but claimed that protest movements accelerate the dismissal of the whole economic and organisational mode of production which was based on the older factory model. Instead they stressed the necessity of establishing a neo-liberal, post-Fordist model. While I refrain from entering into the details of this discussion and its legacy, I take Balestrini and Moroni’s hypothesis of a subversive inversion operated by Italian social movement protests as a step in the direction of dissecting the crisis in Italian modernity.

With the end of the 1970s, a process of radicalisation, repression and violence took the final wave of Italian urban social movements to an impasse (Della Porta 1999). A third phase of mobilisation started in the 1980s with the emergence of environmental movements (Della Porta, 1999; Porta and Diani, 2004). These focused on a broad range of issues, from environmental concerns, to urban security and neo-localist political tendencies. The forms of action that these different practices embodied were of a more moderate, pragmatic nature than the one of the previous wave of social movements (Della Porta, 1999, p.221). In this context the relationship with the local governments became more oriented toward collaboration than conflict (Della Porta 1999, p. 224). At the same time the authors noticed how in this same period a rise in protests relating to specific “urban” issues could be noted in the media (p.52). Urban pollution, as well as
controversies around the siting of residential, industrial or waste settlements became increasingly relevant. Generally, the tendency toward institutionalisation of environmental social movements in Italy is in this period particularly high, to the point where they seem to become pressure groups and lobbies (Della Porta and Diani, 2004, p. 108). In these cases there is noticeably a relationship of “exchange with the state”, where environmental organisations offer themselves as partners and “counter-experts” in the sector of implementation of environmental regulations and plans (Della Porta and Diani, 2004, p. 108). Similar relationships of exchange are also reproduced at the local level between institutionalised environmental organisations and informal local committees whose protests had continued to grow beyond the mainstream success some issues had garnered on national platforms. It is in this context that these local protests can be seen to have developed an egoistic scope contrary to the common good and articulated through localist politics and discourses (Della Porta and Diani 2004, 115). The hypothesis of these authors is that these protests developed within an urban context, arising from instances where city users were confronted with other ways of inhabiting (Della Porta and Diani 2004, p118). These “urban social movements” emerged in reference to the urban struggles for equal rents, services and social housing rights in the decades between the 1970s and early 1980s (Indovina et al. 1974; Della Porta, 1999) but such movements can be further seen as expanding in the 1990s in adherence with new spatial imaginaries that I further explain in Chapter 8. Their organisational structure has often been described as one which is based on “loose networks” between committees and associations, where friendships and shared experiences are central (Della Porta and Diani 2004, 130-131). Previous waves of protests (notably those of the 1960s and 1970s) often resulted in a reconstruction of existent networks of activists around new issues, in other cases it is the space of the neighbourhood that connects different forms of activism (Della Porta and Diani 2004, p. 131). Those networks are able to raise the profile of a protest and articulate claims beyond a local scale along with broader environmental commitments in order to obtain the desired result (Della Porta and Diani 2004, 152).
Summary

In this chapter, I have shown how ideas of ‘place’ can be adopted to disclose a series of tensions and ambiguities within both the Italian state and its discontents. Thinking about places, and the theoretical and empirical contexts where social and political transformation can be anthropologically engaged, offers the possibility to further explain the ideology of modernity and its more superficial contradictions, such as localism and clientelism. Within this framework, the unit of the Italian quartiere di periferia emerges as both a mediator and a looking glass (Herzfeld, 1987, p.15) of the political and social engagement that post-war Italian transformations have initiated. This unit contains not only the traces of official planning narratives, but offers a perspective from which we can trace the experiences and imaginations constructed by its inhabitants. This is a process that disclose a more complex entanglement, therefore transforming the quartiere from a locality into an anthropological place. I have shown that the relationship between planning, politics and social movements needs to be analysed as part of processes of negotiation and contestation extending to everyday life and not limited to the institutional arenas.
Chapter 6: Knowing the plan: The *periferia* between bureaucratic engagement and contestation

In this chapter, I discuss the historical and bureaucratic composition of a Milanese *periferia* throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. I examine the interplay between the realms of planning and politics, and look at the ways in which specific forms of inhabiting place have emerged from the modern history of the city. Focusing on multiple scales of the city plan (PGT), neighbourhood politics and the metropolitan government, I aim to describe the tensions between Milanese political and planning spaces which exist within the context of the *periferia*’s transformation. In doing so I set out the historical foundations of a controversial plan for a new ring road connection crossing the outskirts of the city. By rendering different historical narratives I mark out the long-term trajectory of my anthropological understanding of the temporalities of place by specifically focusing on the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro as a central location. In providing a series of discussions describing how the constitution of place has been assembled, my work explains how the logic of planning beyond the construction of the *periferia* emerges from specific forms of habitation.

Setting the scene: Milanese planning history, the *Gronda* and the old *periferia*

The history of planning in the city of Milan is a framework within which we can discuss the contested trajectories of the establishment of the modern Italian state throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. I argued (in Chapter 4) that this broad narrative of the *periferia*’s history is a key backdrop for examining the redefinition of planning practices and their political and cultural rhetoric. The Milanese *periferia* in this sense acted as a laboratory for modernity within the city (Foot, 2001). The period between Italian unification in 1860 and WWII is, for Milan, a context within which, a specific planning regime was established; this included implementing the city’s infrastructural, housing and industrial development. In this period, planning in Milan emerged as both a discipline of study and as a practice
of administrative, political and bureaucratic governance (Campos Venuti, 1986; Boatti, 2007). As such, planning in Milan can be seen as one of the most effective tools for examining the constitution of Italian modern bureaucracy and the consolidation of the state. In this chapter, I focus my understanding of the social, economic and physical transformations of place and dwelling in the *periferia*. The concept of planning regimes, introduced in Chapter 2 of this thesis, as, “systems of bureaucratic practices emerging from particular socio-historical trajectories” (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011, pp.4-5), is also further explored.

One of the ways in which the practice of planning can be understood as a performative element within the history of Milan, is by considering the opposition between the narrative of planning and the forms of dwelling which emerged in the Milanese *periferia*. In doing this, we can acknowledge and trace the existence of multiple timeframes and spatial reference points. In the Milanese context, Boatti (2007) provided an analysis of the city transformations in a study of the implementation of different PGTs. The PGT, or *piano regolatore*, is considered, within this work on the history of Milanese planning, as a key mechanism for imagining and anticipating possible future outcomes for the city. Together with a certain concept of future development, each PGT anticipates a series of obligations and promises that inform the present (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011). I assert that these strategies can be traced along the trajectories that plans create, which, in turn, attempt to indicate how places ought to be inhabited. Within this narrative structure, it is therefore crucial to articulate the connection between the establishment of the Italian state and the emergence of planning as a suitable system for the organisation and management of social and urban transformation. Indeed in 1865, five years after Italian unification, the official *piano regolatore* sanctioning the city master-plan was introduced. The initial act instructed cities with populations larger than 10,000 inhabitants to produce and publish their plans for neighbourhood regenerations (*risanamenti*), extensions (*ampliamenti*) and destructions (*sventramenti*).

It was in Milan (its population then approximately 350,000) where the first Italian city master-plan was produced in 1884, this was then later approved in 1889 with some modifications. Like most Milanese plans, it was commonly referred to by the name of its
main author, in this case, the architect Cesare Berruto. In 1889, the Berruto plan anticipated a civic population increase of roughly 500,000 inhabitants and proposed new areas of expansion outside the city centre. While this plan was fundamental in the transformation of central and “historical” parts of the city, it was in a second PGT, issued in 1933, that the external part of Milan and its development for the 20th century was anticipated and prefigured. This plan, known as the Albertini plan, proposed a new development of the city including areas of the external municipalities that had been annexed to the city of Milan, resulting in a twofold increase of its territory. The plan provided a new configuration for mobility in the city, anticipating a new circular road crossing the external (and at that time still mainly agricultural) areas of the city. This particular configuration proposed an extension of the monocentric Berruto plan, and included the external areas that were previously independently administrated. The explanation for this tendency towards centralisation has been discussed in terms of utility and profit for the Milanese urban regime, marking a division of classes between the centre, which was destined for public and organisational functions, and the outskirts, where the marginal working classes were housed, within a framework of maximum profit (Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p. 32). This PGT, developed in the context of fascist Italy, was later criticised by planners and academics for prioritising developers’ needs for new industrial spaces at the expense of tenants and the general public, which in turn facilitated a new wave of housing construction and private-land purchases (Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p.30).

At the time of these developments, the area of Quarto Oggiaro consisted of a rural village, constituting part of the municipality of Musocco. Annexed to Milan in 1923, and composed of three inhabited centres, the small settlements of Vialba, Quarto Oggiaro and Musocco accommodated a few thousand inhabitants, surrounded as they were by agricultural land16. In Musocco, the most populated area, a socialist initiative of the council (while still an autonomous municipality) supported the creation of housing cooperatives. In the area

---

16 At the time of the annexation to Milan in 1923 the Municipality of Mussocco consisted of 15,000 inhabitants, including several settlements outside the area of Quarto Oggiaro. An estimation of the population of the settlements of Vialba, Quarto Oggiaro and Musocco does not appear to be available but it is reasonable to assume that the tally would be approximately 5,000, given the small number of lodgings available.
of Via Aldini and Via Mambretti between 1908 and 1927, this initiative constructed approximately one hundred flats. In 1927, the Municipality of Milan also became the owner of land belonging to the Società Quartieri di Vialba, which was previously part of the Scheibler family estate, including a 14th century villa situated in agricultural land. It was here that between 1938 and 1939 construction work began on a development of social housing, known as case minime. These dwellings amounted to approximately 1000 flats within a series of three floors of tenements, each provided with individual services (Iosa, 1997, 180). Here, the population who had been evicted from the sventramenti in the centre of the city were temporarily relocated, for the tenements were intended to last for approximately 10 years. During the WWII, these temporary-shelter houses were severely bombed and a series of barracks were built in their stead to assist those who had been made homeless. After this initial assisted housing settlement, more informal barracks were built, and the area of Vialba became one of the largest refugee areas during and after the war (Iosa, 1997, p. 182).

In these first modern developments, the initial configuration of the periferia can be assessed as, not only the laboratory for planning ideas and concepts, but also as the economic basis of a city transforming in preparation for the future. In the process of preparing for further possible developments, Milanese institutions, in alliance with the main economic elites of the city, supported and implemented regulatory conditions for imposing further controls and interventions. The pre-existing forms of habitation which had emerged from the periferia were erased in a new plan based on a mono-centric grid, which promoted a different type of modern dwellings, and integrated areas which had been incorporated into Milan during the 1920s so omitted from the earlier Berruto plan. The Albertini plan (figure 6.1), which included a new circular road crossing areas in the north-west side of the city, ignored the pre-existing structures of rural settlements in order to impose a reconfiguration of streets and residential structures, extending along the planning grid from the centre to the outside (Campos Venuti et al., 1987, pp. 31-32). By acknowledging this layering of history we can contextualise fragments of the previous

---

17 Against those predictions these houses lasted much longer, remaining inhabited until 1984.
city. The multiplicity of these contrasting, historical compositions are the source material on which the city master-plans of Milan in the last century were constructed.

Within this period we can also examine the tensions and contradictions of this bureaucratic engagement. Planning promises, such as those for more housing, green spaces, more parking lots, increased efficiency of road traffic and safe neighbourhoods, often rely on an abstraction of the conditions of a specific place and are based on, “techno-scientific expertise” (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011, p. 10), in opposition to other forms of expertise and experiences developed by residents. In the next section, I will further explore this opposition in relation to how practices of planning and their contestation provided an ideological basis for notions of corruption and speculation. It is in the opposition between the plans and the existing forms of habitation that the transformations of places happens. In this way, developing what Ingold defined as a, “logic of inversion” (1993, p. 130, 2011, p. 168) with specific reference to planning contestations and controversies, the inversion consists of a process that collapses the variety and multiplicity of dwelling into one form (1993, p. 130; 2011, p. 168). One factor in this logic is the constant recourse to a series of claims and counterclaims, bureaucratic or technocratic forms of control over the otherwise open and disorganised world in which we live (Ingold, 2005, p. 502). This is an approach that can be complemented by Herzfeld’s (1992) less oppositional view of bureaucracy. This is indeed seen as part of a centralising process of distillation which is linked to modern states, but its particular significance is connected with popular reaction and, “the ways in which ordinary people actually manage and conceptualise bureaucratic relations” (Herzfeld, 1992, p. 8). In this way, controversies, disputes and complaints are not necessarily to be seen as being in opposition to an inherently different logic, but as part of the broader experience of the, “ideology and practice of accountability” (Herzfeld, 1992, p.3).
Figure 6.1: the Albertini plan. Approved in 1934, shows the plan for a circular road infrastructure in the external fringes of the city. The areas shown in dark black, were still to be built or developed, yet contained already-established rural and agricultural functions and dwellings, which are not even acknowledged on the plan.
Figure 6.2 Map of the Municipality of Musocco in 1850, from Belli, 1993, cited in Iosa, 1997, p. 142

Figure 6.3: Map of the Municipality of Musocco in 1915 from Belli, 1993, cited in Iosa, 1997, p. 142. The above maps show the early rural settlements of Musocco, Quarto Oggiaro and Vialba in existence prior to the annexing to the Municipality of Milan, which resulted in their inclusion in the Albertini plan.

New neighbourhoods in a new periferia: reconstruction and urban miracles in Milan

In the course of the two decades after the end of WWII Milan radically changed its social and political configuration. At the same time, the destructions produced by the war left the majority of its population in a condition of extreme necessity, which the new political coalition in government in Milan (and also in the central government) tried to tackle through a national housing plan. This was a period of great hope for architects and planners, and their involvement with the years of reconstruction is central to this historical period (Campos Venuti et al, p.36, Di Biagi, 2001, p.3). At the Milan Triennale Museum in 1947, an exhibition under the title of ‘una casa per tutti’ (‘a house for all’) suggested a particular shift in focus which was moving towards debate on the issues of housing by the architectural, political and economic elites of the city. On that occasion, three new projects of social housing-based neighbourhoods to be built in the city were presented. In the same period, a series of proposals by the most prominent architects and planners from the pages of architectural magazines, such as Domus, Urbanistica and Casabella, provided a rich context for debate regarding how the reconstruction of the Italian city could have been planned (Sparkle, 1990). Ideas of morality together with ideological struggle between Christian democrats, socialist and communist values are central to the articulation of the debate before and after the creation of INA Casa national housing program. The low standards of living for the working poor and the unemployed in the periferie of the big cities like Rome or Milan, became a key visual and rhetorical element
in the construction of Italian post-war reality within cinema, photography, television and architecture (Baransky and Lumley, 1990; Lumley and Foot, 2004). Several sociological works documenting the condition of those areas reinforced the necessity to address the structural conditions responsible for the inequality of the Italian economy (for a review see Fofi, 2009, p. 19). It is in this context that the unit of the quartiere became a key apparatus in the redefinition of the new Italian city (Quaroni, 1957, see Chapter 5). It is at the scale of the quartiere that the planning, architecture, politics and construction business in the post-war Milanese periferia established a unit for the composition of place. In 1949, a law that proposed the establishment of a new national social housing program was approved by the Christian Democrat government. This program, named INA casa, was promoted to reconstruct the post-war Italian economy, by offering incentives to the construction industry to provide houses for the homeless and new immigrant populations (Di Biagi, 2001). For twenty years, this plan advanced both the construction sector and local employment levels, through its provision of about 1,920,000 lodgings which were built all over Italy (Di Biagi, 2001, p.17). This plan and its impact upon the transformation of Milan, radically altered the perception of both the periferia and its political and planning configuration.

New planning regulations in Milan commenced in 1948, when a new local administration, supported by a coalition of the Catholics (DC) and Communists (PCI), approved a new piano regolatore. This plan, promoted directly by and taken under the responsibility of communist planning assessor Venanzi (PCI), eventually provoked a series of critiques and was never fully implemented, for shortly afterwards, the local coalition government disbanded. Instead, a new administration, this time supported only by Catholics, approved a new PGT in 1953 (see figure 6.5), one that expanded the areas of new residential development further beyond the historical city centre. The plan included new social housing neighbourhoods created through the INA Casa programme. These new areas in Milan, against the suggestions included in the national plan, were pushed to the furthest outskirts of the city. These were what Foot (2001), defined as the new periferia: neighbourhoods intended to respond to the greatest wave of immigration ever experienced by the city and the exponential expansion of its population and dimensions. The new 1953 plan would remain the foremost administrative planning method until the
mid-1970s, when a new piano regolatore would be presented. Instead, in the twenty years following the 1953 plan, a large number of varianti were approved; in such a manner that many commentators would speak of a piano ombra, or ‘shadow plan’, directing the transformation of Milan (Viganò, 1970; Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p. 46). Now doubled in size and in its population, Milan’s role as an economic, industrial and financial capital became fully established (Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p.35). It was in this period that a general understanding of the relationship between planning and politics started to produce a perception within the population, as well as with a new generation of planners, of systematic corruption and favouritism, often referred to as a blocco edilizio or, speculative bloc (Parlato, 1972, Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p. 46).

Quarto Oggiaro’s history is inextricably linked to this post-war development, as one of the largest social housing areas planned as part of the Ina Casa programme is located there. On the same land, where in 1927 the Municipality of Milan realised the Case Minime, two new housing estates had been implemented; namely Vialba I and Vialba II. On some land further south (owned by the Cabassi family who were one of the largest land owners in Milan during the last century) the social housing developments of Quarto Oggiaro (15,000 lodgings built between 1959 and 1960), Concilio Vaticano II (2,500 lodgings built between 1964 and 1965) and De Pisis (4,000 lodgings built in 1967) were implemented. The ways in which the municipality enforced the social housing plans in Quarto Oggiaro has led Iosa (1997) to describe Quarto Oggiaro as out of planning law – quartiere urbanisticamente fuorilegge (p.161). Residential developments in this area of the city were not included in the 1953 plan and were indeed approved as an extension of the potential residential capacities, or as a cover up of already built structures (Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p.70). The population in Quarto Oggiaro increased from approximately 7,200, before the start of the INA Casa plan in 1949, to 80,000 by 1972 (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 324). Despite impressive investments, the neighborhood, similarly to other Italian public housing quarters, experienced a lack of adequate services (such as schools, parks, shops, and transport). The lack of postal facilities acts as an example to illustrate the general situation in Quarto Oggiaro during this time. For several years the inhabitants

waited for a much-promised post office to be opened and Ginsborg (1990 p. 324) charts the trajectory of this controversy. The Christian Democrats party (DC) promised to open a post office in 1964. In 1967, the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications assured that these plans were at an advanced stage. In 1970, the Regional Director of Poste Italiane announced that new offices were under discussion, but by 1973 these plans were still under consideration (Ginsborg, 1990 p. 324). It was not until the 1990s that the first post office was opened, more than twenty-five years after the DC’s initial promise. This example reveals the exasperation of the periferia inhabitants, who were often provided with second class services and infrastructures, and consequently, felt abandoned by the state. It also illustrates the temporal circumstances of bureaucratic practices within the controversial post-war configuration of modern Italian society.

In the 1960s, Milan went through a period known as miracolo economico, which resulted in a booming rate of economic development and exponential urban expansion. Meanwhile, completion of highways and their connections through a triangular-shaped city bypass had further altered the configuration of Milan’s infrastructural landscape beyond its metropolitan boundaries. Both the highways and ring roads lay outside the city limits and, therefore, required a different coordination of parties directly concerned with their planning; a situation not rectified until 1961, with the creation of Piano Intercomunale Milanese(an assembly of Mayors from the municipalities of the province of Milan which presented its first plan in 1967). While the Municipality of Milan struggled to collaborate with nearby municipalities and preferred to maintain its own privileged position within the systems of planning, it also failed to acknowledge requests for the revision of a shared strategy of mobility across the Metropolitan area (Campos Venuti et al., 1986, p. 106). Within the 1953 PGT, a new circular road crossing the periferia, following a scheme of circular rings around the centre, had been maintained after its proposal in the Albertini plan, but the results of the varianti and ‘out of plan’ developments had radically recast the landscape on the outskirts of the city. In particular, this configuration of residential areas in the northern part of the city altered areas which had been previously considered in 1953 for the trajectory of the circular road. After the end of a wave of construction promoted by INA casa throughout the 1960s, a series of private developments were approved as a variante. These practices of ‘out of plan’ intervention have been known -
in honour of Sant` Ambrogio, the saint of the city - as *rito ambrosiano* (Campos Venuti, 1986, Boatti, 2007). They became so common that they practically define the city's planning regime.

*Figure 6.4: The housing plans for Vialba and Quarto Oggiaro, from Iosa, 1997, p.346*

This housing plan, developed in the mid-1960s, provided one of the largest social housing interventions in Milan and, if added with the later Municipality of Milan's constructions, consists of the largest concentration of social housing in Milan. In the northern section of the plan, the highway creates a strong border between the municipality of Milan and the nearby localities of Baranzate and Pero. On the right-hand side (see Figure 6.4), the railway divides the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro from the areas known as Bovisasca and Comasina, where two further large social housing area were established at the same time. In the south section toward the railway line, it is possible to see the Concilio Vaticano
II housing estate where I was located for the first six months of my fieldwork (see Chapter 4).

Figure 6.5: Milan’s 1953 PRG (general city plan), from Boatti, 2007, p. 58.

Figure 6.6: Detail of the Gronda, north Trajectory from the 1953 PRG, from Boatti, 2007, p. 58.

In this detail, the trajectory of a road crossing the Northern Quarter of the city is maintained and has been slightly modified from the original intentions of the Albertini plan. The arrows, showing the direction of the road, clearly indicate the extra urban scope of
this infrastructure for connecting beyond the city limits of Milan to the cities of Brescia and Novara.

It is in this context, that we can understand the impact and logic of the Gronda Nord. The trajectory of this infrastructure deviates from the initial 1933 proposals, as it would now have to cross a series of residential neighbourhoods constructed in the post-war period. Looking at the example of the Gronda Nord, as well as the history of Quarto Oggiaro, this logic can be understood through planning strategies that were applied between 1933 and the post-WWII period, and still continue to be so. From this perspective, we can identify the scales at which the logic of planning developed. It is important to recognise the role of the actors and different interlocutors of the protesters (such as the courts and institutions) involved in implementing the project. In discussing the Gronda Nord controversy, I query the imagined and proposed scale and proportions of the project; a central factor defining the contestation. This includes acknowledging what lies on the multi-temporal or multi-spatial scale. My interest in this contestation is connected with discussion on how such processes of scaling (of interests and logics) occur. The bureaucratic passages involved in Milanese institutional process of planning, and the legal consequences they manage to construct, offer an opportunity to rethink Ingold’s, “logic of inversion” (see Chapters 1 and 2) within the context of a planning controversy. The logic of inversion and the dwelling perspective need to be seen, not in opposition to, but in relational engagement with, each other. Politicians, bureaucrats and planners who are involved in proposing, approving and implementing plans and strategies of urban regeneration, ultimately deliver changes and redistribute power and wealth. The ways in which the realms of planning and politics redirect the composition of rules and powers, constitutes an inversion which serves to reinforce the position of certain subjects in opposition to others, and thus creates, or reinforces pre-existing, spatial and social boundaries. It is, therefore, within such boundaries that we can understand how inversion operates at a relational level.
The crisis of the *periferia*: the failure of planning between corruption and marginality

A second historical phase, in which the development of the Milanese planning regime can be identified, is connected with the period from the late 1960s to the 1980s. This period is particularly complex and it is therefore difficult to find an overall definition that can unify it. This is a period of “crisis” and at the same time it included a new successful image in 1980, projected by the idea of *Milano da bere* - Milano to drink, (Foot, 2001, p. 165). The crises, arising in the course of the 1960s, were social, economic and political, and it is within these modes that a new series of changes got underway (within the *periferia* as well as more generally in the way local and national scales affect planning and urban transformations). During the second half of the 1960s, the end of the economic miracle led to rising social discontent. A new equilibrium between DC and PCI led to a series of centre-left governments, but this did not stop an escalation of conflicts throughout all the principal Italian cities. For Italy, unlike the other European countries, the uprising of 1968 did not last for a mere few months, but extended into the next decade (Lumley, 1990). By the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, a new political configuration led the way to a new economic boom, and one in which Milan would again play a central role. Since 1976, Milan was dominated by the PSI, a socialist party whose leader Bettino Craxi had initially been a local-level Milanese politician and later served as Italian Prime Minister from 1983 to 1987. Under his leadership the socialist party governed over a series of economic and cultural transformations that focused particularly on Milan. At the same time Foot describes the period between 1976 and 1992 as one which incurred the, “full functioning of *Tangentopoli* – bribesville” (2001, p.164). He defines this as:

> “an almost scientific system, involving all the political parties and many other civil organisations, whereby public contracts and funds were divided between their intended destination and kickbacks to the parties, and local contracts, building permits, and so forth, were awarded via a system of party funding via bribes (which were distributed according to well defined percentages)” (p. 164).
In From the 1970s some *periferia* neighbourhoods began to be negatively described, both in the media and in institutional debates because of high rates of criminality. Due to their predominantly working class composition, these areas in particular had been affected by the post-industrial transformation undergone by the Milanese economy since the late 1970s. In these places, political and social housing struggles reached a peak in the mid-1970s with episodes of prolonged rent strikes, squatting and further escalations of political violence during the so-called, “year of the lead”\(^{19}\). Following a decrease in political struggle in the 1980s, criminality, drugs and street violence took over, and Quarto Oggiaro became the Milanese representation of a ghetto neighbourhood, and was well-known as one of the main illegal drug markets in the north of Italy. Families from the organised mobs of Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta effectively controlled the area and would occasionally engage in murder and racketeering. The history of Quarto Oggiaro and what it represents in terms of marginalisation, degradation and stigmatisation, also constitutes a relevant factor in the definition of the *Gronda Nord* controversy. These ways of understanding Quarto Oggiaro can therefore be viewed, therefore, not just as representations of place, but as particular ways of knowing and experiencing Quarto Oggiaro. Similarly the practices of contestation developed by activists and supporters of the No Gronda Committee, are embodied in their ways of dwelling and inhabiting place. I propose to investigate these practices in reaction to the *Gronda Nord* proposal, in order to understand the history of the neighbourhood and its imagined future.

In 1980, the *Gronda Nord* finally became an approved project. In the northern neighbourhoods of Milan, several committees against this road were rapidly formed. These committees were usually created when the administration approved plans for the construction of new roads intended to cross the existing residential areas. In the course of the different attempts by the municipality to build this road, some fragments of the trajectory of the *Gronda Nord* had been realised. This was the case in Quarto Oggiaro in 1980, where as part of the supporting infrastructure for the Italian World Cup games, a tunnel connecting with the motorway had been completed to provide a quicker access to

\(^{19}\) Here the leaders of the newly formed armed organization *Brigate Rosse* were operating in 1974, and also in the nearby factories of Arese and Pero, where this organisation created its stronghold for the crucial period between 1976 and 1980.
the nearby San Siro Stadium. Another part of the road had been completed across the Niguarda Park, in order to connect the Central Hospital more efficiently to the highways. This guiding principle was in some cases adopted by the municipality to justify and implement their plans, but in many more cases, the committee managed to achieve interruption and delays to the work. This created even more support for the existing committees, which in those years decided to combine as part of a broad coordination base. From this stronger position, the committees began to adopt multiple strategies and practices of contestation against the construction of the road. These strategies included collecting thousands of signatures, organising public events, online campaigning and building a legal case.

Local inhabitants were informed about the project in 1980 when it was announced in newspapers, such as the Milanese based Corriere della Sera, and from some councillors who were more informed about the planning department’s activities. During an interview in his house, one of the founding members of the committee, Giovanni, reminded me of the different political context within which those early members acted during the first days of contestation against the Gronda Nord. In order to help him to recall the committee’s activities and the different stages of the protests in which he had taken part Giovanni asked his wife to bring out the ‘No Gronda’ folder of documents he had compiled throughout those years. Contained therein, were leaflets, newspaper articles and some banners designed for staging a balcony protest against the road. In his account, the unfolding of the Milanese political landscape and the broader events constituting its evolution, were recomposed to explore the dynamic of contention of the No Gronda Nord committee. Once Giovanni and other members of the community who were also against the plans managed to obtain a copy of the documentation and plans submitted for the construction of the road, they realised that the infrastructure proposed a connection between the north-west side and the north-east external Motorway of Milan with a large, four lane road. As I sat with Giovanni, he showed me posters and leaflets charting the first demonstrations against the Gronda Nord, and recalled how activists would follow the movement of politicians around the city in order to demand its removal. The strength of these groups was reinforced by the neighbourhood’s previous experience of political and civil participation. From the 1970s onwards Giovanni had engaged with a series of political
commitments, not limited to the *Gronda Nord*. During the 1980s he became a local councillor for *Democrazia Proletaria* (“Proletarian Democracy”), a party supported by members of the student movement and Marxist-Leninist groups. In Chapter 7 I will further explore the political context of Quarto Oggiaro throughout the 1960s and 1970s, in order to understand the ways in which social movements and protests have been imagined and articulated as part of a strategy of transformation of the *periferia*. This history of committees against the *Gronda Nord* offers a contrasting and illuminating context in which to reconsider the image of Milanese development throughout the 1980s, and the resistance which it encountered in the *periferia* (see Chapters 8 and 10 for a more detailed discussion of how this developed throughout the following decades).

**Summary**

The Albertini plan of 1933, when the *Gronda* had been first proposed and designed, is not, therefore, simply the result of an emerging urban planning rationality, but articulates a series of political tensions across the city, that impacted on relationships, economies and social classes. Its endurance and influence can be perceived in the ability of the plan to articulate an inversion between the chaotic development of a city and the necessity to regulate, organise and create boundaries, where otherwise different ways of being would take place. In this instance, we can see how the planning logic is not necessarily opposed by activists and claimants, through a refutation of its basic principles and purposes. Instead, in the work of many committees such as the *No Gronda*, it is an even stronger belief in the logic of planning that motivates the strategies of the activists. At the same time, this logic does not necessarily constitute the only factor in the activists’ narrative and, in particular, their experience regarding the controversy. Several other factors may inform and give shape to the imaginative capacity of the protesters; some directly connected to their everyday life and habits, their emotions and their personal engagement with place. The logic of planning then, may be as much a rational force, as one that attempts to invert an order.
Chapter 7: Photographic practices, social movements and the past in Milan’s periferia

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between activism and everyday life as part of the constitution of place across different temporal scales. By presenting a personal photographic archive based on the experience of Movimento Studentesco in Quarto Oggiaro, I consider the way it was produced in the course of the 1970s wave of social movement, as well as the relationships both past and present that those pictures have been able to establish. I consider these relationships, by observing how photographic practices were produced, accumulated and brought together in a peripheral neighbourhood in Milan. The mobilisation of this personal collection of photographs, ultimately offers an opportunity to revisit the history, and consider the present, of activism in the neighbourhood.

Militant photography as a framework for collaborative engagement

Photography engages with place at multiple levels. It brings together and revisits the temporalities and the localities of place, adopting creative and imaginative practices of representation, participation and documentation. The practice of photographic collection and archiving involves an “accumulation of micro-relationships” (Edwards, 2001, p. 28), “both constituted by, and constitutive of, a fluid historical process” (Edwards, 2009, p.10). The ways in which these relationships are accumulated and their capacity to further reflect different historical contexts, is particularly central when dealing with activist photography. In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I have argued that the category of impegno defines a specific kind of intellectual engagement and a photographic genre; fotografia impegnata or militante that requires particular attention as a historic and social category. Tano D’Amico, one of the most renowned Italian photographers, discussed the practice of militant photography not just as an act of description, but as a way of composing and assembling values and ideals that define the aims, objectives as well as practices of a social
movement (Tano D'Amico, 1989, pp. 18-19). Understanding this concept is key to appreciating the eruption of the 1968 protests in Italy that extended their influence throughout the 1970s. In that period the Italian *periferia* became highly involved in the transformation of everyday life into a new realm of social movements.

Tracing the relationships within a particular militant archive\(^{20}\), here I examine the way in which it shifted from the private to the public space and how it may provide a lens through which to re-evaluate the micro-history of a Milanese *periferia*. It is in bringing together these different social, political and historical levels, that practices of activism and photography can be adopted to understand how places are inhabited and composed. Cesare Snelli is a 50 year old man from Quarto Oggiaro who has resided in the neighbourhood for most of his life. Born in a social housing flat in Via Amoretti, he now lives in a small one bedroom social housing flat in Vialba, a few hundred metres away from where he was born. Acknowledged by several of my interlocutors in the neighbourhood as a key figure in any discussion or understanding of the radical history and memory of Quarto Oggiaro in the course of the 1970s, he had been a professional photographer as well as a militant in the Milanese 1977 youth movement. During the course of my fieldwork, I discovered his photographic archive, and had several meetings and discussions with him to learn about his youth in Quarto Oggiaro during the 1960s and 1970s. Along with some mutual friends, I was involved in helping him to set up an exhibition of his photographs, which was held in one of the youth clubs in the neighbourhood. The exhibition, featuring 21 of Cesare’s photographs focused on the experience of the youth movement in Quarto Oggiaro from 1974 to 1979, and included the production of a booklet containing written accounts of the voices of some participants. In the course of several months during my fieldwork, Cesare’s archive provided me with a political, socio-historical narrative questioning both the ideas of *periferia* and activism in Quarto Oggiaro, as well as in Milan. The archive, amounting to at least several hundred photographs, was contained in a small number of large folders stored in Cesare’s house, where he also kept original films and prints. Of the photos selected for the exhibition, nine are included in this chapter, and to these I have added another three pictures that were

\(^{20}\) For a discussion of my use of the word "militant" see Chapter 3,
omitted from the exhibition, and one photo that was originally published in 1977. I took the rest of the photos while curating the exhibition (except for one picture, taken by Paolo Bellesia, who co-ordinated this project along with other members of the local youth clubs who also appear in the photos). This selection of old and new pictures aims to present Cesare and his comrades in relation to the socio-historical dynamics of Quarto Oggiaro and the 1970s Milanese wave of social movement.

Figure 7.1: Cesare Snelli in his house. January 2011. Courtesy of Paolo Bellesia.
Figure 7.2: Quarto Rosso group picture in front of their headquarters in Via Concilio Vaticano, on 1\textsuperscript{st} May, Unknown date, but circa 1976-79. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.

Cesare’s photographs offer, not just an in-depth historical documentation of a period of political activities in the neighbourhood, but also the possibility of reimagining place through a series of relationships, now removed and relegated to the private sphere. Engaging with Cesare’s photo archive in the course of my fieldwork, I could trace an aesthetic shift in those photographs from a private collection of personal memories to a new, public and active element of Quarto Oggiaro history. To illustrate this shift, two separate photographs can be used as an example. The first picture (Figure 7.1) was taken by Paolo Bellesia, a young photographer working in Quarto Oggiaro, with whom I collaborated in the course of my fieldwork. The photo was taken during the first of several meetings at Cesare’s flat, where together with some local youth activists, we had been invited to view his photographic archive. The picture, clearly staged, displays Cesare in the small social housing flat where he lives. Cesare is shown with his cameras and part
of the photographs and films that comprise his archive. That evening, for the first time, we shared his memories, including the episodes and contexts in which his pictures were taken more than 30 years ago. The second picture (Figure 7.2) was one of many Cesare took out of his archive that first night. It was the one that most immediately captivating our imaginations. It was taken in front of the circolo giovanile (youth club) in Quarto Oggiaro; one of the places that Cesare and his friends used as headquarters for their activities. Taken on 1st May probably between 1976 and 1979, before the group left for the town centre for the May Day parade. It was through the contrasts revealed in these two images, that the shifts between Cesare’s collection in the private space of his flat, and its new public life- re-engaging the history of the city and the neighbourhood – became clear. After this meeting, the idea of doing something with Cesare’s collection of pictures became a reality. The photographs in the archive acted as a catalyst for the production of further photographs, interviews, and audio and video recordings intended to provide additional knowledge on the archive. Some of the activists pictured in the second photograph were contacted by Cesare, so that they could also tell us their story. The group picture, therefore, became for us both a map and an idea for a collaborative re-imagination of Quarto Oggiaro’s radical history. In the following months, a series of meetings with Cesare and his comrades initiated a collaborative project: a re-visititation of the history of Quarto Oggiaro. The solitary life that Cesare had conducted more recently did not stop him from becoming a friendly and enthusiastic supporter of the social and political activities of the youth clubs.

---

21 The poster in the background is promoting the 1st May demo and has a strong militant aesthetic. In Milan, as well in all the main Italian cities, this period was characterised by an escalation of violence connected with extreme political movements and armed groups that since the 1970s had emerged as central protagonists in the political debate. These will be remembered as “the years of lead”, and Cesare and his friends, although operating within a non-violent organisation, such as the MS, had been witnessing a growing escalation of violent protests and repression that would not stop until 1980.
Back to the beginning: youth clubs and everyday militant activism in the 1970s

Between 1976 and 1979, *Quarto Rosso* was a local newspaper and a workers’ cooperative emerging from a local *circolo giovanile* as part of the student organisation, *Movimento Studentesco*. This was a group that emerged as a result of the 1968 wave of protests, within the University of Milan, and it soon became the most prominent group organising protests within the University. It maintained its prominent position throughout the 1970s when other organisations took the lead in other Italian cities (Lumley, 1990, p. 87). During the 1970s, *Movimento Studentesco* decided to bring their protests outside the University to engage directly with the struggle of factory workers as well as in the working class neighbourhoods. It is in this last direction, that the promotion of *circoli giovanili* became one of the elements of the *Movimento Studentesco* politics. The Quarto Oggiaro group was composed primarily of students and workers, both coming from within and outwith the neighbourhood, attempting to engage with one of the most complex working class areas in Milan. When they were still attending high school, Cesare and his friend got in touch with activists of *Movimento Studentesco*, mainly students and professors at Milan University. Cesare and his friend were not only too young to have experienced the wave of 1968, and the environment of Quarto Oggiaro in which they were living was one with very limited alternatives, still dominated by traditional political and cultural influences, of either the PCI or the Catholic church. It was precisely in search of different social practices, that they became involved with the *Movimento Studentesco*.

The 1968 and late-1970s student and youth movement, together with a series of struggles in the work place (the *autunno caldo* or hot autumn) culminating in the years 1969-1971, a critical discussion began regarding workers’ rights, as well as the nature of democracy within Italian politics (Ginsborg, 1990, p.309). In the meantime the PCI and the DC started to discuss a series of shared strategies in an attempt to calm the political unrest intensifying in various Italian cities. This process of collaboration brought the polarisation of Italian politics between communists and Catholics to an end. This period, what became known as the *compromesso storico* (historical compromise), opened the way to a wave of contestation led by the extra-parliamentary left, as well as by groups emerging from
occupations of universities and factories (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 354). At the same time, the PCI and the DC appeared to be no longer capable of containing the expectations of a better life raised by large sectors of workers and students. It was in acknowledgment of this disillusionment that in the early 1970s, the Movimento Studentesco (alongside other radical-left groups such as Lotta Continua, Autonomia, Potere Operaio and others) proposed practices and strategies of civil disobedience such as proletarian expropriation, wildcat strike and refusal to work. With these “ideological” and “political” aims, this broad constellation of movements started to forge stronger links between the younger generation of students and workers living at the border, far from the wealthy areas of the city centre (Lumley, 1990, p.115).

Within this ideological framework, Quarto Oggiaro provides a unique context for considering the composition of such struggles within the everyday existence of an urban neighbourhood and as part of the Italian periferia (for a historical discussion of this category, see Chapters 5 and 6).

Placing Quarto Rosso: from the streets to the archive and back

Focusing on the activists' experiences emerging from the Quarto Oggiaro club, in this section I provide an understanding of the everyday practices of activists connected to this group. The performative element of place and the relationships that are established by the activists within its sphere of action are a central element in the process of re-imagination of the archive. Here, the process of imagination is one that provides, “the conditions under which unconditioned outcomes come about” (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen, 2009, p. 19). It is with this understanding of imagination, that in this chapter, and in Chapter 10, I unfold the capacity of place through different political technologies. Here, the photographs, do more than simply document a historical period, they generate a series of connections which transcend time and space. Only by reconnecting those different temporal phases can an alternative concept of place take shape. Figures 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 show a series of photographs taken during the initial period of the Circolo
At this early stage, they used a room which was offered to them by the local branch of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in Via Vittadini, as their meeting space. In showing me these pictures, Cesare was reminded how the everyday social attitude that united the group was always ironic and surreal as a way of counterbalancing the strong ideological drive at the core of the Movimento Studentesco. The behaviour of activists is normalised thought pictures of them relaxing, reading the newspapers, looking at some posters or posing in front of graffiti in the street. The activities of Quarto Rosso in Via Vittadini eventually resulted in a difficult cohabitation. After initially authorising the use of part of their space, party militants requested the young activists to join as official members of the PSI. A few weeks afterwards, as a result of this undesired affiliation, the group decided to occupy an abandoned shop in the neighbourhood and use it as a cultural centre. In the same period, similarly to Quarto Rosso in Quarto Oggiaro, hundreds of youth groups were formed all over Italy. They were mainly known as Circoli Giovanili or Circoli Proletari and, apart from a few that were directly organised by structured political groups such as Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio or Movimento Studentesco, they sprang mostly from spontaneous direct action by local youths. In the course of the 1970s a process of re-composition of these youth groups would lead to the organisation of the 1977 cycle of protests. In the pages of the Quarto Rosso paper those protests were presented, discussed and analysed. Similar publications produced by groups all over Italy circulated among the young activists, bearing an influence not just on their politics, but also on their sense of aesthetic, in manners of dress and creative expression, including their music tastes.
Figure 7.3: Circolo Giovanile in Via Vittani, Quarto Oggiaro, circa. 1975. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.

Figure 7.4: Circolo Giovanile in Via Vittani, Quarto Oggiaro, circa. 1975. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.
Figure 7.5: Outside the Circolo Giovanile in Via Vittani, Quarto Oggiaro, circa. 1975. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.

Figure 7.6: Demonstration in Quarto Oggiaro, 1977, Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.
Figure 7.7: Demonstration in Quarto Oggiaro, 1977, Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.

Figure 7.8: Demonstration in Quarto Oggiaro, 1977. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.
During the 1970s, with the completion of the national and regional plan of social housing, the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro became the area with the greatest concentration of social housing in Milan. After initial investments from the state for the realisation of the initial infrastructure of the neighbourhood, a series of interventions, including public transport, green spaces and services for the community were still lacking. It is in this period that local groups began to form, with the aim of putting pressure on the local government to support more investments for the inhabitants of the *periferia*. These calls for investment in public spaces were partly motivated by a series of scandals and episodes of corruption that saw the Milanese governments promoting private investment in the housing sector by offering planning concessions to land owners. The youth club in Quarto Oggiaro became engaged in these issues, publishing within their magazine *Quarto Rosso* a series of interviews with academics, professionals and local politicians who denounced the practices of *speculazione* (speculation) proposed within the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro, for it was felt that these measures would have negative repercussions on the quality of life of its inhabitants (*Quarto Rosso*, 1977). Other groups in the neighbourhood promoted a rent strike in the social housing blocks as well as squatting in the unrented flats.

A series of photos from Cesare’s archive provide an example of the aforementioned tensions in the *periferia*, illustrating the narrative through providing a visual documentation of how the *Quarto Rosso* and other militant groups intervened in the neighbourhood. Figure 7.6 illustrates a demonstration in which the *Quarto Rosso* group were involved; a march in Quarto Oggiaro that had been organised asking for the construction of social services and public green areas in the neighbourhood. The photo is taken in the area of Via Pascarella, and on each side are the two social housing estates that were experiencing the highest concentration of lower working class families, unemployment and resultant criminality. A group of children in the front line hold a banner with two women; behind them, other banners denounce the attempt by private development companies to speculate in a working class neighbourhood. In the background, more banners belonging to the group can be seen, promoting the demonstration. Passing through the streets of social housing estates, the march brought together a mixed composition of local and external activists, as captured in these photographs. Bringing
together their contestation as they go through the neighbourhood, their practices openly connected their claims for a better and different neighbourhood directly to the existing social housing estates. This is not just a form of protest against the, “elusive promises” (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011) of planning but also an attack against the speculative logic of Milanese urban regime. Canevari (1986) proposed an understanding of Milanese urban regime in terms of the *rito ambrosiano* model (see Chapter 6) as a “generalised violation of the plan” (p.113, my translation). In the period between the 1960s and 1970s, this practice was associated with a tendency within institutional planning of pushing for private developers’ interests, through the constant approval of exceptions to the plans (p.111). As a contrast to these tendencies within Milanese institutions, in the same period, the role of social movements in the *periferia* neighbourhoods provided a more complex picture and an attempt at reversing the logic of *rito ambrosiano*. The housing issue was then embraced by students, workers and tenants, with the request of a reform of the sector that called for a *diritto alla casa* (right to housing). In this context, the Milanese *periferia* provides a productive idea of place as a nexus of contestation, imagination and political composition that my engagement with the memories and past of Quarto Rosso activities in Quarto Oggiaro can further document. Cesare’s photographs show a specific capacity for articulating the complexity of the social and economic conditions of 1960s and 1970s Quarto Oggiaro. The following two pictures (Figure 7. 7 and 7.8) show the conclusive moments of the demonstration, depicting activists tearing down the fences that surrounded the construction site and then entering into the abandoned ruins of an unfinished building. This building was intended to become a private residential complex, composed of 12 towers each consisting of 11 floors, with a large area of underground parking space (I will further discuss this same housing complex in Chapter 10). In proposing a symbolic occupation of this “private” construction site, they were also adopting a meaningful practice for both the activists and the social housing tenants of the neighbourhood. These are practices of contestations and activism, an exploration into the meaning of politics in the neighbourhood, which provided, for the first time in Quarto Oggiaro, a model for action that was directed toward the transgression of the logic of planning as a way of addressing the tensions created by the *rito ambrosiano* in the *periferia*. It is difficult to say how much these forms of contestation still hold a capacity to
address the problems currently experienced in these areas of the city. Their imaginative power and their symbolic value, however, remain a strong inspiration for those activists and residents of the neighbourhood who are still active around those issues. The fact that the development of the housing pictured in the last photographs of the demonstration, returned to be contested by the tenants inhabiting them in the context of my fieldwork (see Chapter 10), not only provoked comments and discussion with many of my informants, but provided an element of strong imaginative capacity for rethinking the limits of politics in the neighbourhood.

A place of political engagement: Piazza Capuana revisited

Piazza Capuana is a square surrounded on three sides by the front faces of three large social housing blocks that sit at the centre of Quarto Oggiaro. During the last decade, this place has become shorthand for the image of the Milanese periferia as an abandoned space and ghetto. By introducing Piazza Capuana as a place of political engagement, I follow the movement of Cesare’s photographs from the archive to the streets. Further exploring the relationship between the group’s activities and the transformation of this neighbourhood, I focus on the changes defining Piazza Capuana as a micro-history of Quarto Oggiaro and beyond.
Figure 7.9: Cesare interviewed in Piazza Capuana in preparation of his archive exhibition, July 2011. Photograph by Alessandro Froldi.
Figure 7.10: Protests at the local supermarkets, Quarto Oggiaro, 1977. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.

Figure 7.11: Mercatino Rosso (Red Market) in Piazza Capuana, Quarto Oggiaro, 1977. Courtesy of Cesare Snelli.
I shot the above photograph (figure 7.9) in the summer of 2011 in Piazza Capuana, when Cesare was being interviewed by Anna, an activist from a local youth club called *Quarto Posto*. In the foreground, Aaron and Valerio from another local youth club, *Baluardo*, were also present, helping to film the interview while I was taking photographs and assisting with the recording. Here the re-visititation of *Quarto Rosso* moves from the archive to the streets, to retrace its history as part of the neighbourhood. This is ultimately a process of archive emplacement. By recording, picturing and interviewing Cesare in Piazza Capuana, the experience of *Quarto Rosso* is re-established in the neighbourhood. There, in 1976, the collective of *Quarto Rosso* established a self-managed centre squatting in a disused shoe shop; a few months later, Cesare and his comrades managed to acquire some funding from the broader network of the *Movimento Studentesco* and rented another shop in the area. They decided to create a social cooperative to sell food as well as books, music and political material. They called this new space *Quarto Rosso* using the same name as their magazine. Cesare described the *Quarto Rosso* cooperative as a place promoting social and cultural activities directed toward the neighbourhood. There was a bookshop called *Centro di Cultura Popolare* (popular culture centre), and a ‘consumption cooperative’ called *Cooperativa di Consumo Popolare*, where food was sold directly to the social housing inhabitants for a cheap price. This was, for the *Quarto Rosso* group, an attempt to become part of the social space of the neighbourhood by offering more structured services and practices of support for education, culture and consumption\(^{22}\).

Other practices that activists adopted to engage the population were related to promoting a different idea of consumption and participation in the use of public spaces. Creating what they called a *mercatino rosso* (red market) they started selling products they obtained from their contact with the local smugglers and the ‘everyday criminality’ that was populating the area. They decided to take this initiative further in a more structured form, and opened a shop where, alongside books and magazines from the movement, they were selling food and clothes from the black market. The *Cooperativa di Consumo Popolare* shop (which can be seen in Figure 7.13) was in Piazza Capuana, and had to

\(^{22}\) This new space was legally rented thanks to the donations and investments of some of its members, unlike the previous headquarter which was an illegal squat.
engage with the local dynamic and tensions experienced by the neighbourhood. The phenomena of criminality and the mafia, were becoming serious issues for the neighbourhood, and a growing number of criminal ‘families’ based in the social housing blocks became involved in establishing control of the square, so it could be used as a place for drug-dealing and smuggling. Cesare described the involvement of the movement with the people in the neighbourhood, arguing that they were not an isolated group. He was indeed proud to remember that the people from the neighbourhood were taking a significant part in the activities of the Quarto Rosso group and joined with the activists assisting them in the organisation and development of their ideas. While most of the activists were university students strongly motivated by Marxist-Leninist ideology, they learned to discuss and engage with a generation of youngsters from Quarto Oggiaro who didn’t necessarily share their political commitment. The place where there was once the Quarto Rosso Cooperative is now a section of the Democratic Party and its youth club ARCI (where Anna and the Quarto Posto group are based). In the second picture (figure 7.12) taken during the same session of interview in Piazza Capuana, the daytime population of the square became active on the set of the interview, listening and commenting on Cesare’s story of Quarto Rosso and the Movimento Studentesco in Quarto Oggiaro. These pictures add a relational context to Cesare’s archive. In this way, the photographs enacted a dialogue with the new context in which they had been placed and traced, and could, therefore, be seen as actively remaking their meaning (Edwards 2001).
Figure 7.12: Interviewing Cesare Snelli in Piazza Capuana, Quarto Oggiaro, July 2011. Photo by Alessandro Froldi.

Figure 7.13: Quarto Rosso’s Shop, 1977, Quarto Oggiaro. Photo by Cesare Snelli published in Quarto Rosso, spring 1977.
The experience of *Quarto Rosso* came to a halt with the end of the 1977 movement. Between 1977 and 1979, an intensification of political violence and armed struggle took place within the extra-parliamentary left. Large-scale state repression organised by the Italian government involved the mass arrest of militants from most of the extra-parliamentary left organisations. This period also saw a decline in mass movement mobilization and the so-called *reflusso*. The repercussions of this decline, especially among the youth movement in Quarto Oggiaro resulted in the halt of *Quarto Rosso* activities. Lacking the support from the broader areas of the Milanese extra-parliamentary left, they had to close down the social co-operative. After the failure of the *Quarto Rosso* project, the PCI paid the debts accumulated by the collective and decided to open, in the same space in *Piazza Capuana*, a new local branch of the party. This place (now owned by the Democratic Party) is still run by local activists, who use the space for informal
meetings, and as a coffee bar. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a series of police interventions challenged the traffic of drugs in the area and arrested several members of the criminal organisation involved. Against the backdrop of this chequered history, the square is connected with local politics, as a symbol for the necessity of social intervention for the present generation of activists, like Anna, Valerio and Aaron, who still wish to contribute to social justice. Cesare’s photographic archive provided a set of traces and trajectories that helped creating a map of how activists imagined and re-imagined the neighbourhood, starting from everyday relationships. Cesare’s pictures were able to inspire the new generation of activists who viewed and wanted to utilise them. This is ultimately a way of, “opening up spaces in which the undetermined outcomes that we call imagination emerge” (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen, 2009, p.25). In showing his pictures to a new, younger audience Cesare redefined the division between private and political photos, without necessarily removing them from their context. This overlap between political and personal modes, was part of the practice and ideas of the movement in which he and his comrades were participating. The politicization of the personal sphere is indeed one of the defining elements for this generation of activists (Lumley, 1990), and a sentiment that resounded several times during my interviews with Cesare and his comrades.

In the final picture from Cesare’s archive (7.14), Piazza Capuana is crowded with people attending a concert during the Movimento Studentesco Festival: this image is still able to fuel the imagination of place and inspire the possibility of intervening within it through the use of cultural and social practices, relationships and activities. The piazza as a container for youthful energy is a particularly striking image that contrasts with the shared visualisation of Piazza Capuana as an abandoned place, the shopping centre for drugs in Milan and an area controlled by Mafia families. By acknowledging this contrast between the reality shown in the picture and the one experienced by younger generations of activists, it became possible to re-engage the archive and to return it to the public domain. Working together to create this shift, the efforts of the new generation of activists, as well as the ones that took part in the interviews, led to the building of the specific idea of Piazza Capuana, and how the aims of Quarto Rosso emerged as a way of inhabiting place. In their aim of directly reinvigorating those relationships, the construction of the photographic
exhibition in Piazza Capuana became a meaningful project for various people who were involved. Hosted by the space of the PD branch, the exhibition performed and produced a different visualisation of the square. This is the moment in which these photographs returned to act as political and public interventions in the neighbourhood. The reconstitution and revisiting of Quarto Rosso created by a new generation of activists, both engaged Cesare’s photography and his comrades from the Movimento Studentesco, while at the same time producing new forms of awareness of the periferia, its history and its potential for social change. From my own perspective, this engagement offered an opportunity for collaboration as part of a broad reflection on the particular meaning of Quarto Oggiaro for different activists and residents. During the preparation for the exhibition, different interests and aims were creatively and collaboratively brought together; as Cesare’s photographs moved from his personal archive to a public setting they not only acquired a new audience, but created and shaped a series of personal and political relationships between different people and groups involved in the process.
Figure 7.15: Quarto Rosso exhibition opening, 8\textsuperscript{th} September 2011, Piazzetta Capuana, Arci club, photo by Alessandro Froldi

Figure 7.16: Quarto Rosso’s exhibition opening, 8\textsuperscript{th} September 2011, by Alessandro Froldi
Figure 7.17: Quarto Rosso’s exhibition opening, 8th September 2011, by Alessandro Froldi

Figure 7.18: Quarto Rosso’s exhibition opening, 8th September 2011, by Alessandro Froldi
Summary

Focusing on the micro-relationships found within, and brought about by, a photographic archive in this chapter, I have discussed how practices of engagement inform the constitution of place. I have argued that a relational approach to place is central for the understanding of the different narratives imposed and built upon social movements. Proposing a micro-historical approach towards the understanding of youth activism in a Milanese neighbourhood, I intended to examine the memory of the past within a set of social relationships. It is as a result of the expansion of the archive, that relationships with place have been reconstituted with the aid of additional media and forms of knowledge production. In this way, Cesare’s archive has transcended being part of a private collection to being in the public realm, and with this transition the biography of this movement became key for me, in understanding the present of the neighbourhood and the activists’ practices that still inhabit this place. In order to do this, I have traced different historical and social contexts in which this connection could be presented. Along with these tensions and contradictions, I argue that the meaning of the revisited memory of Quarto Rosso performs a particular act of political imagination, in response to the transformation that occurred there during the course of the decades between the 1980s and early 2000s. In the course of the thesis I further examine how the relationship between planning and politics came to be transformed in Milan from the 1990s (see Chapter 8) until the current decade. In Chapter 10 I further explore how the changing relationship between planning and politics is not necessarily based on fixed boundaries, but instead continually transforms itself. In this sense, the social and economic crisis that is at the core of the wave of social movements that I have presented in this chapter, can be related within the new context of crisis that has emerged in Europe and in Italy since 2008, because of the global recession.
Chapter 8: The logic of the controversy: post political reconfiguration of the periferia

In this chapter I discuss how the 1990s saw a shift in the way planning and politics were understood and configured in Milan. In particular, this period envisioned a series of transformations within Milanese politics that changed how government institutions interacted with civil society, neighbourhood committees and grass-roots organisations. Untangling the intricacies of politics and planning from this period and still present in modern day Milanese governance, I advance an interpretation of this phase as part of a redefinition of political and non-political boundaries. In so doing, I explore a series of transformations in the way politics and planning became entangled, and the consequent reconfiguration of planning practices, rhetoric and interventions.

New politics, new places: the Italian crisis over and beyond the 1990s

The period between 1992 and 1994 is for Italy one of, “profound and dramatic crisis”, which is, “complex and often contradictory in nature” and cannot be unified in a single key issue (Ginsborg, 2001, p. 249). In this period, the, “techno-scientific expertise” (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011, p. 10) provided by planners to the Milanese administrators, revealed the reconfiguration of political power as central to the Milanese metropolis. This is certainly a phenomenon that can be observed at a wider European scale, where simultaneous transformations in the logic of planning have been occurring since the 1980s (Murdoch & Abram, 2002). Thus it should not necessarily be seen as an Italian or Milanese phenomenon. At the same time, the specific conditions shaping the Italian political context are, here, accounted for by discussing how such expertise had been put to work within a process of transformation of political governance. Politicians and planners started to envision new forms of collaboration with private developers within a framework of public-private partnerships contributing to the reshaping of the city. The periferia offered a site where post-industrial ruins and cheaper land-value provided a concrete
laboratory for public-private cooperation. Proposing here a series of vantage points from which to read this period, I claim that the interaction between different events and aspects need to be taken into account, to show how this period should be considered and how it developed into a new configuration. In doing this, I also concentrate on how the Milanese *periferia*, as an evolving place, can be adopted and analysed to shed light on the tensions and conflicts which this crisis came to embody. Both the national Italian level and Milanese metropolitan scale are traced within the confined space of Quarto Oggiaro neighbourhood and how the crisis was performed there. This approach, far from pretending to offer a unified vision for this period, aims instead at opening up of the complexity of the crisis, through the different experiences of politics, planning and social movement. It thus connects the national and metropolitan scale within the trajectories of transformation embarked upon by Quarto Oggiaro.

In 1992, the *Tangentopoli* judicial inquest and scandals brought to the surface a series of contradictions between Milanese politics and planning that had characterised the Milanese context since the 1960s (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of this system of corruption). These events turned the image of Milan from an Italian economic and moral capital into a symbol of a corrupt political and economic nexus (Foot, 2001, p. 167). At the same time, in the months immediately following the beginning of the *Tangentopoli* inquests, the whole Italian political context quickly underwent ‘epochal transformations’ that prefigured the creation of a new political landscape in the country (Ginsborg, 2001). To better understand the nature of these transformations, it is necessary to discuss how this specific configuration of power was produced, and how the relation between politics and planning contributed to the constitution of a new balance in Milan. Planning practices and ideologies offer a key for understanding this period of transformation and how the city as a social and political context was discussed and interpreted. I explore this configuration along different scales, where multiple institutions contribute to the composition of Milanese political and planning regimes.

The evolution of Italian and Milanese institutional politics between 1990 and 2010 is crucial for reconfiguring the meaning of planning controversies. In this context, Milan experienced a new political era, where the left-wing socialist party that governed the city
from the 1970s to the 1980s, seemed to disappear overnight amid accusations of corruption (Foot, 2001). Also on the left, the conversion of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) into a centre-left regime changed the way the two traditional Italian political identities, communists and Catholics, were imagined and contested (Blim, 2000; Ginsborg 2001). The PCI during the course of the 1990s, the PCI underwent several changes and splits that prefigured the formation of a more moderate, democratic and reformist party, under the name of Partito della Sinistra (PDS), then Ulivo and finally Partito Democratico (PD) attracting a significant proportion of the Catholic left. These changes also promoted a representation of the Italian ex-communist left as a *partito di governo*; a party capable of governing the country. This proposition was only partially successful, for even though the centre-left managed to win the election in 1997 and 2006, they were ultimately enmeshed in weak, unstable coalitions fuelled by division and conflict of leadership.

New right-wing political formations, such as the Lega Nord (Northern League) and Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* (FI) (renamed *Popolo delle Libertà* in 2007, or PDL) gained and maintained exceptional power from 1992 until 2011, forming three national governments in 1994, 2001 and 2008, and throughout these years in Milan city council and the whole Lombardy region council. While Berlusconi’s political organisation emerged in the 1990s from the commercial and entrepreneurial spirit of its founder, it was in Milan in the 1980s that he started his career as a developer in the housing and construction market. The success of *Lega Nord* can be associated to both a spirit of anti-corruption as well as the emergence of new ‘localist’ sentiments (Stacul, 2003, 2006) and new forms of identitarian integralism at the margins of the nationhood (Holmes, 1989, 2000). In Milan, *Lega Nord* achieved surprising success at the 1992 election resulting in their first Mayor in a large Italian city. In 2012, twenty years after their political breakthrough, in an electoral agreement with Berlusconi, the same party elected their candidate to the government of the Lombardy regional council, and demonstrated their long-standing influence on Milanese political life and affairs.

Parallel to the transformation of institutional politics, the nature of social movements provide a useful starting point for tackling, more specifically, the roots of Italian political
crises of particular times. As discussed in chapter 7, the period of 1968 to 1977 can be taken as a long wave of social protest capable of importing and producing innovative forms of engagement with politics. With the end of this wave and the start of a period known as *riflusso* (reflux), the phenomena of popular political engagements during the 1980s seemed to retreat from mainstream culture into the underground, often localised around single issues or specific localities. Two areas where this shift is particularly evident are in ecological movements (Lumley, 1990) and the development of urban social movements (Della Porta and Diani, 2004). These two categories were both associated with a paradigm of new social movements and provide particular significance for the shaping of mobilisation strategies in a transformed political landscape and the urban realm as well as in broader regional reconfigurations of the countryside and suburbs. Equally, these movements provided innovative approaches to the way local politics had become a focal point for addressing broader issues about relations with environments, localities and ultimately, as discussed in previous chapters, anthropological places. At the same time both movements, in continuity with the previous wave of dissent, raised a series of oppositions to the ideology of modernity, modernisation and its aggressiveness (Lumley, 1990) as well as answering to new ideologies of privatisation (Muehlebach, 2009, 2012) and neoliberalism (Mole, 2012). The infrastructural and industrial development of large sections of the countryside had radically reshaped the perception and configuration of post-industrial Italian cities, neighbourhoods and regions from Milan to Turin, Venice and beyond. Administrative and political borders thus began to be addressed, and were informed by new images that escaped traditional configurations, aiming to grasp multiple and broader phenomena.23

A third level at which the crisis of politics during the 1990s can be assessed, is in light of the configuration of urban regimes and the role of planning within the new political context. In Milan, one of the consequences of the *Tangentopoli* inquiry in the 1990s was the

---

23 As an example of these meta-categories, the metaphor of, “the infinite city” has been mobilised to describe the way in which Milan transformed from being an industrial city to a city of fluxes (Bonomi and Abruzzese, 2004). This powerful idea found immediate resonance with the Milanese institutional elite. An exhibition entitled, “la città infinita” presented this transformation as a way to imagine the city in the prestigious venue of the Triennale Museum. Within this narrative, millions of people, cars and other private and public vehicles, institutions, businesses and corporations were visualised to construct an image of flows connecting Milan with other places in Italy, in Europe and in the World.
erasure and disrepute of large sections of the political elite. This institutional and political 'void' promoted throughout the course of the next decade, bore witness to new relations between institutional planning and academic institutions in Milan (Healey, 2008) and, broadly, between the areas of politics and planning (Gonzalez, 2009). It is within this nexus of contested and expanding spheres of authority and control over the transformation of the city, that I develop my approach to Milanese planning for this period. Healey (2008) synthesises this shift as one from, “politically legitimated experts” towards “intellectually legitimated expertise” (p.867). She traces this trend within a European-wide impetus in the late 1990s, where politicians turned to academics, lobbyists and pressure groups requesting, “not just new knowledge and strategic concepts, but also some way of establishing the legitimacy of new policy ideas and practices” (ibid., p. 864). While this thesis focuses on the experiences and perspectives emerging from neighbourhood committee members and inhabitants of the city, it also assesses how institutional practices in strategy-making and planning operate as both an intellectual and a political ‘fix’, building conceptual frames and coalitions between key stakeholders (Healey 2008, p. 865).

It is around this gathering capacity of planning, that I focus this chapter, and in particular, look specifically within the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro, and the ways in which these ‘fixes’ include and exclude certain subjects, ultimately contributing to the making of places. The aforementioned transformations of national institutional politics, social movement practices and planning politics, demonstrate a central role for Milan in this framework as part of a new configuration of power, and provide different angles on where to connect specific urban transformations. By proposing a more detailed exploration of how the project of the Gronda Nord was integrated within broader tendencies in Milanese politics, I discuss how this controversy in Quarto Oggiaro created an articulation on the grounds of a city power structure, as well as its tensions and contradictions. Broadly, it is possible to view this as a concrete intervention for transforming the periferia, compounded by the stark contrasts in municipality and committee attitudes on how transformations should have been implemented in the years between 1992 and 1997. The future of the periferia, in addition to its past, became a broader part of a necessity in Milan’s governing class, to newly reinvent itself for presentation to the rest of the country.
In 1992, the Milanese administration ruled by Lega Nord recommenced the project of a connecting road across the north of the city under the new name of promenade, reshaping the architectural features of the previously proposed Gronda Nord project. The road was planned to be part of a green alley, thus aiming to limit the impact on the neighbourhoods that would be crossed. A German landscape architect was specifically commissioned to design the green spaces to be associated with the road and produce a series of visualisations that were published in local newspapers. Again, the No Gronda committees organised meetings and events to inform the neighbourhood about the impending plans for this road. The committees aimed to demonstrate that the nature of the internal motorway was more than a mere promenade. The project was announced as a solution to local traffic and a positive element of connectivity between the neighbourhood and the city. The activists that I contacted stated that this new project instead showed that the proposed road traversed several neighbourhoods, impacting upon these and the large populations inhabiting the north of Milan. To the activists, this infrastructure was indeed intended to connect, not only one neighbourhood with another, but also the two sides of the Milanese north motorway circle, effectively cutting the city in two.

It was only at the end of the 1990s, with the then centre-right administration, that the project obtained renewed enforcement. Rebranded Strada Interquartiere Nord (SIN) this was once again presented as a conjunction between different neighbourhoods, but also serving locally providing a pedestrian alley, tramline and bicycle path. As before, this project encountered the contestation of local committees all along the proposed trajectory of the planned road, demonstrating that the organisation of No Gronda groups were still strong and active in proximity to the project. In the meantime, the city council also implemented a double-sided intervention in several peripheral neighbourhoods, mixing social and physical transformations. In Quarto Oggiaro, this approach involved a series of police-led initiatives that radically intervened and combatted organised crime in the area, leading to hundreds of arrests and evictions. On the other side, a project to regenerate the neighbourhood was promoted as part of a new private housing area built on a disused industrial area (Torri and Vitale, 2009). In the years between 1992 and

24 Even with these interventions, the reputation of the marginal neighbourhood remains attached to its inhabitants. Some local grassroots groups have been involved in initiatives for the last 10 years, with
1997 a project of urban regeneration (P.R.U), for the south area of Quarto Oggiaro was shaped through a series of private and public initiatives of planning and financing, involving the municipality of Milan as well as national and regional bodies. During the same period, several P.R.U.s would similarly be promoted and approved, mobilising the biggest constructing development in Milan since the post-war period (Bolocan, Goldstein and Bonfantini, 2007). The regeneration of this area created a new residential neighbourhood for a population of 3,000 inhabitants surrounded by a large green public park. This was presented to the inhabitants of Quarto Oggiaro, as well as in the local media, as a positive solution. It was within this project, that the idea of the Gronda Nord was reintroduced again as a new multi-purpose road infrastructure, but this time with reduced costs and advance investments by private developers. The main partner of the Municipality of Milan in this project was the real estate agency Euromilano S.R.L., in charge of the works and sales of the residential towers. This partnership also included the involvement of a bank, for the financing of the works, and a leading supermarket, for the building of the megastore in the area. A series of limited social housing and student halls would also provide a series of additional social compensations obtained by the Municipality with these partnerships.

With this project, the new entrepreneurial sensibility of the city administration was presented as a radical change from the typology of social housing neighbourhoods proposed 50 years before for Quarto Oggiaro, one of the largest of such programmes in the Italian post-war era. Here, the municipality wanted to show how a service-based economy and a private-led approach to the transformation of the periferia, could provide a solution to its long-term problems. The acceleration of the Quarto Oggiaro regeneration plan intensified existing tensions between how the periferia could be transformed to improve neighbourhood conditions (Healey, 2008, p. 868). In this way, the interventions focused mainly on the regeneration of the industrial areas and, initially, ignored the existing inhabited housing of the neighbourhood. The idea of creating a new

________________________

activities devoted to promoting a different image for the neighbourhood by delivering practices of everyday sociality, cultural activities and sport. These activities and practices, even if not directly related to the controversy of the Gronda Nord, defined and constituted a relevant field where activism is practice on an everyday level.
neighbourhood within Quarto Oggiaro can also be seen as part of an entrepreneurial tendency to manage the *periferia* as a speculative field for the construction of further external developments.

**The legal, spatial and imaginative recomposition of Quarto Oggiaro 1997-2008**

The period between 1997 and 2008 can be seen as a phase of continuity and empowerment for the above-mentioned, recomposed relationship between planning and politics. A centre-right coalition was confirmed in power at both city and regional levels in Milan, and a number of projects began to be approved and realised over the course of this period. From the perspective of the *Gronda Nord* controversy, the re-election of the centre right government in 1997 and 2001 supported the necessity to continue on this line and speed-up the realisation of the road. The major element of acceleration of the dynamic of contention can be attributed during this period to the final approval of the project and the start of the works on site (Armentano and Ricci, 2007). In 1998, in the space between Quarto Oggiaro and the abandoned Fina refinery towards the south side of the neighbourhood, was a large construction site that had been quickly put in place. There, the new project for the road continued its idea of proposing, not just a road, but a 'linear park', as well as solutions for sustainable mobility; it included a four-lane road together with a new tramline, a cycle path and a pedestrian alleyway. This new multi-purpose road and the residential area was approved as part of the P.R.U. and appeared together as part of the same development, in an architectural visualisation brought about to promote the sale of the new flats in the newly built tower blocks. To communicate and promote this residential development, the visuals had also been printed onto large plastic banners and attached to the fences of the construction site. A 3D plastic model of the project was on display in the offices of *Euromilano* S.p.a., which was the developer firm taking over the construction and the sales of the residential units. At the same time as *Euromilano* S.p.a. promoted their project, the committees of Quarto Oggiaro, together with other organised residents along the *Gronda Nord* road, brought their objections to a series of legal courts at Italian and European level. The projected imagination of the plan
and its legal contestation by these committees during this period, then clashed over the reality of the project, its own justification and the authority of those promoting and contesting it. It is during this period that most of the public and visible protests were organised in different neighbourhoods. In Quarto Oggiaro, as well as in other neighbourhoods, these protests received wide support among the residents that were involved in covering expensive costs for legal disputes. A series of court decrees resulted in a temporary cessation of the works. This was viewed as a success for the activists, as it forced the municipality to redefine their plans and the design of the road.

Understanding these court judgements requires focusing on the legal, planning and environmental rules that are active, both on Italian soil and under European legislation. Trust in the expertise of lawyers and planners informed and constituted the activities, discourses and practices of the protests within the committees against the Gronda Nord during this period. At the same time, an understanding of the politics of the construction site had been disputed by the municipality of Milan, as well as all of the institutional and private actors that the committee managed to legally challenge within this period of time. Documents, plans and bureaucratic texts acted in the composition of place and in the

Figure 8.1: Map of the Euromilano’s Certosa project (from a promotional leaflet, date of production 2006-2009)
political and planning negotiation that then resulted. Specialised offices and institutions in the Milanese planning domain produced plans, as well as visuals, presentations and an anticipation of the impacts of the project. In the course of my research, I learned how this bureaucratic and planning documentation was regularly discussed and distributed during meetings and assemblies of the committee members, shared via email and integrated with comments and counter-documents by a group of core members of the committee as well as from a limited number of experts and professionals who supported their work. Each of the activists I have met had accumulated a large amount of Gronda’s archival material, including maps, legal documents, statements and plans from the municipality as well as newspapers cuts and reports. Using a mailing list, No Gronda active members shared relevant material as soon as they found it, to ensure an informed dialogue. The social composition of the committee members is central to understanding how these materials were continually brought together, discussed and counteracted by the protesters. A significant number of the most committed activists were middle class and shared educational backgrounds. Many of them occupied public offices as local politicians and councillors, while others had administrative positions working in law, architecture and planning. At least two of the members I contacted worked as planners for public institutions. This shared know-how provided the committee with a series of contacts in high positions at local, regional and national levels and gave them the capacity to interpret and discuss the technical language and the implications of each of the Gronda Nord incarnations.

An important claim, forming the basis of the Gronda Nord controversy, can be understood as part of a broader reconfiguration of the nature of politics bound up in the state of environmental emergency, officially declared by the City of Milan through a Prime Ministerial Decree (Decreto del Consiglio dei Ministri) issued by the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. This decree considered a number of reports issued by the Mayor of Milan, Gabriele Albertini, informing the government of the negative impact of car traffic pollution in the city. This was presented as the result of a lack of road infrastructures and parking spaces. On the basis of such a critical situation, the decree deemed it necessary to put a series of emergency measures in place. An official order, issued by the Minister of Interior, nominated the Mayor of Milan as a commissario straordinario (extraordinary appointed
commissioner), in charge of finding a solution to car traffic issues in Milan by the end of 2003. During this period, as part of these plans, the Gronda plan, under the name of Strada Interquartiere Nord was approved and its construction works prepared, together with a new general city traffic plan, Piano Generale Traffico Urbano (PGTU). The temporality of this emergency can be seen as a narrative upon which the logic of planning unfolded its power upon Milanese politics, which included both a capacity of controlling the present configuration of politics by imposing a certain narrative of the future as well as its implications for the past (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011, p. 3). In this case the state of emergency gave the Mayor of Milan extraordinary planning powers, leading to a shift in the way metropolitan issues, such as car mobility and air pollution, could be addressed. These issues were transformed into matters of national interest. This act enabled a specific organisation of powers within the management of the Gronda Nord project as well as within the broader organisation of Milan: the documentation deposited by the municipality of Milan in the course of the legal controversies with which the activists were engaged in the Gronda Nord controversy, specified that the Mayor of Milan had been appointed as a superintendent for the task force against this emergency. There is then a temporal and chronological trajectory to these claims and forms of organisations of different institutions involved in this controversy. On 22nd March 2002 the Mayor, in the role of superintendent, approved the first programme of works and interventions in order to cope with the emergency of traffic mobility. Within these interventions lay a variation to the General City Plan (dating back to 1980) for the construction of a road between Via Eritrea and Via Nuova Bovisasca. A technical committee (comitato tecnico-scientifico) for traffic emergency later examined and approved this project. On 29th October 2002 the Mayor of Milan, as commissioner for the emergenza traffic, ‘car-traffic emergency, approved the final project for the building of an inter-neighbourhood road between Via Eritrea and Via Nuova Bovisasca. With this act, the Mayor declared public utility of the road and an urgency to avoid any further delays (indifferibilita).

At this juncture, the Municipality of Milan attempted to speed up the road’s construction by appointing Metropolitana Milanese, an external company under the control of the council, giving them a mandate to conduct all technical and administrative tasks for the realisation of the intervention. Concurrently, the start of the legal controversy brought the
project to new and larger scales of discussion, at levels including regional, national and European courts. When the committees obtained a winning sentence from the European court, the municipality of Milan confirmed its power with the support of the Italian court, Italian government, regional and city councils. Strathern (1991) warns of the effect of scale shifting as one of producing both a, “multiplier effect” and a, “relativising effect” where new connections and more complexity produced at the extent of a loss of information (p. XIV-XV) and with the consequence of making everything seeming partial (p. XX). This double trajectory is also present in the Gronda Nord contestation where, across the different court stages, the project was articulated to expand its connection with other government bodies, while also accepting that discussion could only be performed at different geographical and institutional levels from the one of the neighbourhood. By 1st April 2004 the European Environmental Commission had sent a letter of concern regarding the section of the road crossing Via Eritrea and Via Bovisasca, because no environmental impact assessment had been conducted for it. This was a response to the decision of the No Gronda committee to appeal to the European Court in order to stop the construction of the road. Subsequently, the Municipality appealed to the national government to obtain an extension of their authority. In this case we can see how the boundaries between different scales can be blurred and might be produced to different degrees of control. For example, the responsible institution for the delivery of this evaluation sits in the offices of the Lombardy region; an institution which since the 1990s, had been ruled by a political right-wing coalition between Lega Nord and Forza Italia, a similar case to that of the municipality of Milan, which I discussed earlier.

Taking a similar position to Healey (2008), Gonzalez (2009) analysed knowledge flows and underlined another planning trend that emerged in Milan during the early 2000s. This resulted in the adoption of what she called, “relational thinking in the Italian way” (p. 38). This consisted of, “the combination of a strong localist and regionalist project with a relational concept of space and openness to flows of global capital” (ibid.). While creating new imagery for the city elites, ideas of flows and relationality have been used to rebrand a number of controversial developments. The plans for car traffic mobility and the new PGTU, along with a series of Municipality of Milan-issued outlines for the new PGT, can be interpreted as part of a broader shift in planning-language and -thinking. The traffic of
the city was to be addressed through adopting a relational language which would promote ideas of networks, global communication and place making. At the same time, a narrative of emergency justified specific interventions, transforming the relationship of power at different levels. In this phase, the particular configuration of powers that approved and sustained the construction of the road, managed to overcome local protest by adopting an emergency framework of governance. This approach would then serve as a method applicable to a number of other interventions of urban governance, not limited to the issues of road planning, and covering disparate topics such as immigration, drug use, noise and alcohol consumption, illegal Roma settlements, urban pollution, traffic, housing occupation and political squatting. In the case of Emergenza Traffico, the narrative of emergency produced by the municipality would influence the way urban interventions of the state and its local institutions could be imagined. The city of Milan was to become an exemplar laboratory for urban governance in Italy, while also aspiring to attract international investments in the profitable sector of housing and construction. In order to do this, a necessary form of disconnection with the limits of local politics needed to be produced, to provide the legal and administrative power needed for attracting large scale urban transformation projects and investments. In 2007, this finally materialised with the city’s successful bid to host the World Expo fair in 2015. The local elite’s project to insert Milan into the spaces of global capital flows is linked, therefore, with the parallel tendency of disconnection of the unheeded claims of its citizens over the basic problems of the city (Gonzalez, 2009, p.31).

Towards the Expo: a new centrality for the Gronda

The transformation of urban places within the landscape of Milanese politics from 2007 to 2009 requires a particular focus on the image of the city adopted and proposed to lead its future development. The successful bid to host the Expo in 2015 in Milan retains a central position in the re-shaping of Milan’s image as a global and international city. In 2008 the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE) announced that Milan would be hosting the Expo 2015. This was a period when many of the projects approved in the previous
years by the right-wing administration of Letizia Moratti and her predecessor Gabriele Albertini, were still at the early stages of approval or construction. Meanwhile, a new general plan was in its final stages and would substitute the now-obsolete 1989 plan. With the concretising of the Expo a few miles from Quarto Oggiaro, the Gronda and struggles of the committee had to challenge an even stronger opposition on the side of all of the local and national institutions. In this way, both the future and present status of the periferia, and the processes of transformations in Quarto Oggiaro as well as in the broader metropolitan area of Milan, collapsed under a series of interventions, where ideas of citizenship and dwelling at both local and larger areas centrally emerged in the reconfiguration of Milanese politics.

On 20th March 2008, the centre-right government of Milan’s municipality approved a new project, whereby the road would connect between Viale Zara and the new Business Fair Hub in Rho. Following an appeal made by 78 citizens, who were all residents or house owners along the route of the original Gronda Nord project, the European Court in Luxembourg ruled that it was the Italian state court that should be made accountable for the final decision. This appeal was directed against three main scales of institutional, political and economic power in Italy. At the local level, it appealed against the decisions taken by the municipality of Milan and the Mayor of Milan as representatives of the committee for urban traffic emergencies. At the national level, it appealed against the decisions of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transports, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Presidency of the Ministries. Together with these institutional levels the appeal also specified the private companies, Euromilano, which was developing the area where the Gronda in Quarto Oggiaro had been planned, and Metropolitana Milanese, as the private enterprise designated by its main shareholder, the Municipality of Milan, responsible for the road’s construction. The decision passed by the court was issued on a 33-page document, providing a short narrative of the different legal and administrative steps of the controversy. It is in the re-positioning of this counter logic and the inversion

25 Delibera di Giunta n°254605/2008. See also the newsletter published online: http://www.chiamamilano.it/notiziario/290/2 http://www.chiamamilano.it/media/00files/080529delibera_giunta_2008_03_20_gronda.pdf
between ways of building and ways of dwelling, that a re-composition of the construction site as a place of negotiation can ultimately be found.

Figure 8.2: Aerial view of the project. This plan, developed in the interim period between the late 1990s and early 2000s, with a few detailed modifications. It then provided the backbone for the final construction of the Gronda Nord in Quarto Oggiaro under the name of the Strada Interquatiere. It was then modified as the Zara-Expo road following the final approval of plans for the realization of the World Expo Fair. Image taken from http://www.euromilano.net/progetti-euromilano-certosa.html (last accessed October 2010).
Figure 8.3: Detailed birds-eye view (west side). In the south side of the picture the Certosa Residential housing developed by *Euromilano* can be seen, and in the North section, the existing sporting facilities and the social housing in Via De Pisis. Image taken from [http://www.euromilano.net/progetti-euromilano-certosa.html](http://www.euromilano.net/progetti-euromilano-certosa.html) (last accessed October 2010).

Figure 8.4: Detailed birds-eye view (east side). The detail shows the bridge crossing the railways and the last part of the Concilio Vaticano Housing, which crosses the Simoni Park before continuing across the Bovisasca neighbourhood. Image taken from [http://www.euromilano.net/progetti-euromilano-certosa.html](http://www.euromilano.net/progetti-euromilano-certosa.html) (last accessed October 2010).
The sentence of the European Court imposed a stop to the works on the construction site of *Gronda Nord* in Quarto Oggiaro, thus confirmed the alleged non-conformity of the works proposed by the city council and contested by the *No Gronda* committees. While the legal configuration of the controversy appeared to be partially halting the capacity of the municipality to implement the works, the physical and material transformations occurring in the construction site seemed to contradict these configurations. When I began my fieldwork in October 2010, I visited the area. It had previously been completely fenced off by the construction site of the *Gronda*, but in 2010 a temporary road was created to allow for traffic while the construction site remained open, but only on the side of Quarto Oggiaro at the front of the residential area of Via De Pisis. As I had been informed of the successful results from the European Court sentences, I was more than a little surprised to see that the construction site had advanced. The configuration of road traffic appeared similarly to the pre-construction site situation, with car and truck mobility permitted in the direction from Quarto Oggiaro crossing towards the north-east neighbourhood of the city and also connecting with the bordering areas below the rail lines surrounding the south-east side of Quarto Oggiaro and the new residential area of *Certosa*. The new road substituted the Via de Pisis/Castellamare and passed onto the trajectory of the *Gronda Nord* from Via Eritrea, because the Concilio Vaticano Street was where a new bridge was in the planning stages. As an alternative to the new bridge which had been blocked by the court sentence, the temporary road led to the old bridge a few metres south (see Chapter 9 for an ethnographic description of this configuration based on a walk with a resident of Quarto Oggiaro). The SIN should thus be seen as a process of constant negotiation and dialogue with other elements emerging from Milanese planning and politics. The road was shaped and connected with the existing mobility infrastructures within the neighbourhood, further developments have constantly been introduced by planners in order to connect this road outside of the neighbourhood. This particular configuration was not connected to the project proposed for the road, but emerged as a temporary configuration. The solution was reached by the municipality after a negotiation conducted between different interests, needs and discussions represented by the residents in Quarto Oggiaro contesting *Gronda Nord*, the Private Estate
‘Euromilano’ and the residents of these new housing areas. Private meetings between the planners in the municipality ‘technical office’ and the different groups of citizens were conducted. These negotiations were conducted particularly in order to resolve a problematic situation denounced by new citizens from a residential area called Certosa-Euromilano. Almost 2,000 residents gathered (similarly to the residents in Via de Pisis and Concilio Vaticano II Street) and closed in on one side of a construction site. Only one road then connected the site with the main roads in the area, which added some disruption to the normal traffic. A few months later, the municipality restarted work after having been provided with a renegotiation of the project and the works to be completed. In practice, they started to complete what they defined as “side works”. These were structural or underground works connected to the road, but not necessarily related to the project mentioned in the European Court order.

In the final phase of the project, the configuration had to be rearticulated around the connection, not simply between two sides of the city, but between the city and the Expo as a symbol of the global future of Milan. Still an important part of the project, a bridge crossing the neighbourhood and connecting the Quarto Oggiaro segment of the road alongside the railway line remained incomplete, waiting for further environmental authorisation by the institutional bodies. Similarly a tunnel connecting the road towards the highways and ultimately to the World Expo 2015 site still needed further approval and discussion. Within these two differently contested and undetermined ends, the Gronda Nord/SIN construction site in Quarto Oggiaro extended for one kilometre (see Chapter 11 for specific analysis of both sides of the construction site). The construction site, positioned in the middle of two urban parts, can be identified as a segment of a broader project, as well as a local intervention within a changing neighbourhood. The meaning and scale of this road is, therefore, open to interpretation, and is central to the whole controversy. It cuts across a highly populated environment, including a series of historical social housing blocks and schools in Quarto Oggiaro, and on the other side, a newly built residential estates, Certosa-Euromilano, which had been completed by a private developer in 2009 on a post-industrial site. The case of the connection with the Expo site explains the shifting nature of the road, as well as the multiple temporalities incorporated.
by the project and articulated through logic of inversion that followed a multiplicity of temporal and spatial scales.

The reorganisation of the *Strada Interquartiere*, within the context of Milan’s political changes over two decades from the early 1990s, offers a situated perspective of how the acceleration of urban transformations fell back into what the previous critics of the developments described following the paradigm of the *rito ambrosiano* (Campos Venuti et al., 1986; Boatti, 2007). The actuality of this paradigm rests on the ways in which planning regimes in this new period were maintained and supported through new practices and ideologies. The acceleration of urban transformation, thus intersected different practices of local politics, planning and governing the territory. Private interests and public administrations, in continuity with the *rito ambrosiano* model, still adopted rules of exceptionality, often in justifying already implemented plans (and ultimately abusive constructions) with the interests of housing market speculations. What changed was the neoliberal and managerial context of post-*tangentopoli* Milan, where urban transformations could be framed as part of a, “new renaissance” (Gonzalez, 2009, p. 36) with reference to the springing-up of large scale projects, investments and constructions occurring in Milan over the two decades between the 1990s and the 2000s. It is in this context, that the relationship between politics and planning, shifting towards a “management without politics” (Martinotti, 2005, p. 44), can be seen as an updated version in the new context of the 21st century, and the *rito ambrosiano* constituted by different forms of elusiveness in the composition of place and in the management of the planning process. The *Gronda Nord* controversy offers an original example of this logic expanding and shifting the scale of contrasts, through sites, institutions and public bodies. While doing this, politics returns to the picture by mobilising claims and contrasting the limits of the protesters in dealing with the different scales involved. Ultimately, this process of the confrontation of claims and counter claims, central to Ingold’s idea of “logic of inversion” is not just an abstract process but a technical, political and planning project based on the capacity of production of specific discursive, legal and intellectual frames. These frames are based on the relationships of strict collaboration between municipality, region and national government as well as academic and professional institutions, and constitute a body of authority against which the *Gronda Nord* committee had to struggle.
over the course of more than 20 years. This has meant, in many cases, finding a way to create a valid counter-narrative in the planning process. In some cases, the inherent limits in the committee’s capacity to scale the controversy up or down were revealed as their incapacity to have their voice recognised within the frameworks articulated by the municipality. At the same time, in this process, the committees developed another perception of their ideas around dwelling, social justice and rights to the city. This construction of political imagination does not necessarily oppose two political visions or two sides contesting power. This cannot necessarily be defined as conflict between a leftist and a rightist understanding of planning rules, as discussed for the earlier period of Milanese planning (Vicari and Moloch, 1990).

Summary

In this chapter, I claim that the controversy emerging from the Gronda Nord planning and construction is based on a discrepancy between different ways of building, dwelling and understanding the construction site, as well as different perceptions of the present, past and future of the periferia. The ways in which politics and planning managed the contingency of the construction site for the Strada Interquartiere illustrates the capacity of administrative, technical and legal practices for anticipating expected outcomes by controlling the ways in which the present is inhabited, imagined and contested. This is a more nuanced narrative of Milanese politics, where the periferia can be traced with new physical borders, as well as internal divisions between social housing areas and the advancement of private residential developments. In the following chapters, I provide further explanation of how these developments, together with the building of the Gronda Nord, have been both implemented and contested on the ground.
Chapter 9: Ethnographic imagination at the crossroad: walking the scale of the construction site

Here, developing a place-based theoretical approach I situate an ethnographic account of a walk conducted as part of a preliminary visit to Quarto Oggiaro in 2009. Thinking of the forms of contestations and dwelling as mutually co-constituted, I explore the configuration of a construction site and consider its role within broader debates over the nature of Italian and Milanese planning. I walk in and around the periphery of the construction site with an active interlocutor, who is himself involved in contesting its existence. He provides me with a particular perspective on the imagination and anticipation of place. Walking provides an exceptional method for opening up the relationality of place, and the different scales and orders that inform the composition of urban places. It simultaneously provides an understanding of the partiality of place, and its continuous composition and recomposition. It is through these partial relations with place that the ethnographer and the activist together create new forms of place making. In this context, I position the walk as a collaborative endeavour in my own fieldwork, which is relayed in this chapter.

Walking with Guido: contrasting visions and scales of place

The practice of walking is useful for connecting the experience of everyday places, as well as the different ways we learn about and later discuss them. Here I discuss how the concept of scale is adopted to balance and creatively intervene with the experiences and togetherness that walking opens up. When walking with someone in the course of my fieldwork found that that conversations, as well as sometimes social relationships and reciprocal learning we were establish, are central to how I understand place. This approach makes the social and cultural conditions that support my fieldwork explicit, and involves a necessary reflection on how collaboration in the course of fieldwork is established and extended. Walking is an ideal experience for understanding the potential
of learning and togetherness that being in a place with someone entails. We need to ask how these brief moments of togetherness teach us ways of practising and dwelling in a particular place. Drawing critically from the seminal works of De Certeau (1984) on walking as an “inscription practice”, and on Mauss techniques of the body, Ingold and Vergunst (Lee and Ingold, 2006 Ingold and Vergunst, 2008) conceptualize walking as “thinking in movement” (2008: 3) and introduce an understanding of walking in relation to embodiment and sociability (2006, p.68). In this context, it is important to stress how walking allows for an understanding of place as defined by “the shifting interaction of person and environment” (p.68). A second element in their understanding of walking lies in its sociability, to be understood as not simply “walking together” but a process of “learning” and “being together” (2006, p.83). These two elements, of learning and being together, are particularly important for repositioning not only how we think about walking but also about how we relate this practice to our own anthropological knowledge process.

With this understanding of anthropological knowledge, the ethnographer’s own biographical experience is not removed from the relationship developed during fieldwork. Instead, it is a central element of understanding practices of dwelling and what it means to live and inhabit a particular place. In my case, the city of Milan and neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro provide me with two scales along which my own and my interlocutors experiences are articulated. My previous experience of living in Milan cannot be fully distinguished from the experience of my fieldwork, however, so I propose these two in resonance with each other and positively contributing together to my anthropological project. My own reflexive engagement with place can thus be seen in my position as a student, a researcher and a white North Italian man, sharing language and dialects with my own discussants in the field. This supports the need to acknowledge the “empirical unpredictability” (Spencer, 1997, p. 9) that comes from taking my interlocutors’ position seriously, without dismissing or framing them on the basis of previous experience, theoretical assumption or intellectual orientation (See Chapter 1 and 3 of this thesis). In this chapter I focus on my engagement with a particular resident of the neighbourhood, Guido, a 50-year-old private consultant specialising in copy-editing, who had been living in Quarto Oggiaro with his wife and their daughter for most of his life. He has been particularly active as a grassroots organizer in different local groups and networks.
Despite not considering himself to be a core member of the *No Gronda* committee, he supported and sustained their protests, and followed the controversies for a long time. It was by mobilising his knowledge of the neighbourhood and his understanding of Milanese planning and politics that I could further explore the practices of imagination of place created by planning controversies.

Guido is not a resident in the immediate vicinity of the construction site, but as someone who lived in Quarto Oggiaro for most of his life, he understands that impact of the planned road extends far beyond the limited area where the noises of the cars would be more directly encountered. His perception of the project and its impact is particularly informed and detailed, offering a useful insight into how planning controversies are mobilised. In his personal archive, Guido collected a number of different documents, articles, and official material pertaining to the activities of the committees and the legal controversy. This material had been helpful for him in his role as an editor of the local magazine "*Vivere insieme la periferia*" ("Living together the *periferia*"'). This publication, supported by the local association *Quarto Oggiaro Vivibile* (Liveable Quarto Oggiaro), covers various issues of interest in the neighbourhood. The publication was distributed and financed by donations from subscribers and advertisement fees paid by local businesses. The association QOV of which Guido was part has been active since 1980 and organised several entertainment and sports events in the neighbourhood public parks, where they also ran a summer camp with animations for younger children. His experiences as a community volunteer and his knowledge of the history of the neighbourhood were useful to me for discussing how transformations in the area are experienced by the local community through the connections between socially active residents (Froldi 2009). His role as a community volunteer had made him a particularly prominent member of the community since the end of the 1990s, when he had been active in a process of public participation organised by the municipality of Milan during a project of neighbourhood social regeneration, sponsored by the European Union, called "Urban II". In his long experience of community engagement, he developed several skills and participated in many networking opportunities, public engagements, and institutional presentations, especially those dedicated to issues of regenerating Quarto Oggiaro and the Milanese *periferia*. In all of those years, Guido never committed himself directly to politics, but often
critically engaged with the institutions and politicians that came to Quarto Oggiaro. He is thus for me, a central interlocutor for hearing and learning about how local grassroots groups had been taking part in processes of local planning, politics and contestations.

Planning one of my preliminary visits to the main site of my research, I learned how my initial approach to ethnographic knowing would not go unnoticed, provoking reaction and then disapproval from my interlocutors. I had asked Guido to take me on a walking tour around a construction site in Quarto Oggiaro. Hearing that my initial research interest was concerned with tracing activist perspectives, he was only partially happy with the way I framed my research. For him my definition of activist, as those contesting a project, limits the field of neighbourhood contestations in ways unlike his experience. Just moments after we started walking, he objected to my analytical framework: “I don`t consider myself an activist”, he told me, “I prefer to be considered an active citizen” (my translation). He explained the distinction this way: “I take part in different grassroots organisations in the neighbourhood and I have been involved in and supportive of, different committees, at times contesting or collaborating with the institutions and political spheres of the city” (my translation). This objection illuminates an understanding of construction site controversy and the social relationships that it creates within a neighbourhood. Guido, as a cittadino attivo, happily discussed my work during fieldwork, but wanted to inform or object to my initial understandings of the contestation and how this played out in the neighbourhood. The difference between activists and active citizens in Guido`s opinion, is one that could be ignored if do not balance our initial theoretical and analytical framework with the empirical and ethnographic encounters that happen in the field. By respecting and accepting Guido`s objection, I was offered the chance to perceive his own preoccupations and perception of the controversy. He was concerned with the necessity for the supporters of the controversy to balance their own engagement and disengagement with different institutional and political subjects. If the definition of activist, is, ‘too political’ for Guido`s understanding of his own engagement, ‘active citizen’ is more suitable for describing his role within the neighbourhood. What he wants me to understand is the shifting meaning of politics in everyday life. Referring to Quarto Oggiaro, Guido`s primary objection to my initial understanding is focused on his ability to speak from more than one position, and also beyond the partiality to which activists are commonly seen to be bound.
This openness fits with the way experiencing planning controversies and understanding construction site protests, as well as other practices of dwelling and contesting, I have encountered in my fieldwork. I learned quickly that I could not take for granted any predetermined definitions and conceptualizations without losing the chance to build deeper research relationships with my interlocutors. These moments involve balancing detachment with forms of engagement and collaboration in the field. By walking along the construction site engaging with my interlocutor’ reconstruction of the controversy, a series of contrasting visions were materialise. Different narratives, practices of imagination and anticipation position the effects of the construction within different scales, proportions and political meanings. These elements can be connected with the debates on the interplay between planning and politics in Milan anticipated in chapters 5 and 6.

**Functions and scales: visioning and sensing the contestation**

The following is a reconstruction of the walk focusing on a series of vistas, devices and elements from the construction site as a continually negotiated and contrasted place. The walk was conducted on 7th November 2009, lasted around an hour and a half and continued through an extensive area surrounding the *Gronda Nord* construction site. Knowing that I was equipped with a camera and I would be taking pictures of the walk, my interlocutor organised our tour around the most significant points so I could focus on different positions along the construction site and beyond. These sites offer a particular vista, from where Guido’s explanations of the plans could be facilitated. I discuss these vistas as a way of constituting a contrasting imagination, where the temporalities of the site are mobilised and it is possible for local activists to demonstrate their position in the controversy. The starting point of our tour was the view of the construction site from Via Eritrea. Here, the construction site intersects with the main access road to the neighbourhood, connected to the south through a bridge crossing the railway. At the time of our visit on a mid-afternoon day of November, the traffic returning from the centre of Milan created a long queue of cars that looked almost still along via Eritrea (see figure...
9.1). It was from this point that I started taking pictures while Guido described how our surroundings had been impacted by the construction site.

![Figure 9.1: Guido at the intersection between Via Eritrea and the Gronda construction site](image)

From where we were standing (Figure 9.2), we could clearly see the two different sides defining and characterizing the contestation of the construction site. To the left of the site stood the last row of old residential housing of Quarto Oggiaro, mainly social housing estates built during the 1960s. On the other side, the recently completed residential complex Euromilano, now inhabited by a mix of private owners and social housing beneficiaries, though the latter were the minority. It was between these two perspectives on the construction site that a contrasting vision of place took place. Guido’s perspective remained rooted in a vision of the Quarto Oggiaro neighbourhood as the result of Milanese post war modernity, still aimed at promoting a form of grassroots democracy.
Here Guido provides me with a central element for understanding the way he mobilises, imagines and anticipates the effects of the construction site. The intersection point between the unfinished road, currently in construction, and the existing road system (Figure 9.2 and 9.3) shows how this contrasting imagination works and materialises along the site. This was where the contrast became visible and materialises itself concretely. Over the course of this encounter, Guido starts presenting to me the ways in which the new road integrates with the mobility of the neighbourhood and the existing flows of movement in the broader context of the city. He makes it clear that the existing road and the new one could not easily co-exist in the current configuration of transport infrastructure. The area, especially in this section, is already unable to deal with the existing traffic during rush hour, causing long queues of cars in both the morning and evening of the working week. From this perspective it was unlikely, in Guido’s opinion, that the new road would have a positive impact, instead adding further traffic congestion to the existing road system.

The different scales at work in Guido’s explanation are central to interpreting how the construction site articulates forms of detachment and recomposition of place in the neighbourhood. Scaling the project into his own everyday life, in the neighbourhood Guido presents the site to me stressing that he could actually see how this road was not meant to connect the neighbourhood locally with the nearby areas, but operated on a different scale. Guido told me: “Questa non e` una strada interquartiere, ma una autostrada”, (“this is not an “inter-neighbourhood road, but a highway”). This articulation of the project is the scale at which, from his and the committee’s point of view, the municipality, planners and developers are really working on. The idea and indeed the strategy of connection to the Expo 2015 site, is perceived by the committee as an admission of their actual expected outcome. The committee thus engage actively with the transformation of Milanese politics (described in chapters 8 and 10 of this thesis) and produce a way of contrasting and renegotiating the meaning of the construction site. For Guido, this is not just an ‘inter-neighbourhood road’ but a ‘highway’ in the middle of a popular residential area. The construction site for the Gronda Nord and the transformation of the south side of the neighbourhood into a new residential area increases the distance between the imagined future and the present configuration of the neighbourhood. Cutting across the area from
one side to the other, the road would cover the space left between the social housing blocks of Quarto Oggiaro and the new residential development of Certosa Euromilano, creating a new infrastructural border. The No Gronda committee, who consist of, and are supported by fellow Quarto Oggiaro inhabitants, all too clearly understand how the proposed intervention of this high speed infrastructure would disconnect their homes from the surrounding localities. From Guido’s point of view, the plan to bring more additional car traffic inside the neighbourhood was ultimately transforming the neighbourhood as a lived and sociable environment. Building on this contrastive imagination of the scope of the plan I argue that the category of composition of place that I have mobilised in my theoretical approach is one that bridges Guido’s perspective with discussion on the nature of the projected road in relation to the neighbourhood. This is ultimately a relationship composed of the multiple temporalities, including past, present and future, inhabiting place and feeding into the perceptions and the imagination of what this means for its residents.
Figure 9.2: The construction site from Via Eritrea. Photo by Alessandro Froldi.

Figure 9.3: The construction site from Via Eritrea. On the left the housing estate in Via De Pisis, on the right the new area built by Euromilano. Photo by Alessandro Froldi.
Projecting the *Gronda* beyond the road

In the context of the *Gronda* construction site, place is both materially and imaginatively composed. Walking along various vistas, I present a way of disentangling this composition and show how it produces new forms of knowing politics. Continuing our walk along the right side of the construction site, parallel to the *Euromilano* housing estate, another element of material and imaginative contrast caught Guido’s attention. Just next to the newly built housing and a few metres from fences delimiting the construction site, we ascend to the top of an artificial hill from where I took a photo (see figure 9.4). Reaching the summit, we catch a glimpse of the construction site. The adjacency of the hill to the residential area stood, as Guido explained me, as a contrasting element in the imagined landscape of the project. The hill in this configuration can therefore be interpreted not just as decorative, but also as a protective device. This shift in the function of this constructed landscape reopens the question of scale in the project. From this perspective, the hill acts as a cautionary device for one group of inhabitants, the residents of the newly built *Certosa* residential area, from the noise and view of the road. In this way this functional shift reproduces an imaginative scale of the road, opening up its potential production of noise and traffic disturbances.

A third contrasting vista that emerges during the walk is linked to a shift from the micro-scale of the intersection point toward a larger green space being developed on the *Euromilano* side of the project. The *Euromilano* Park, called *Franco Verga*, consists of 200,000 square meters, 1,100 trees, fountains and children’s play areas. The park occupies areas reclaimed from a contaminated site after the dismissal of a petro-chemical plant. This park, realized in the area behind the residential housing, had been open to the public for only a few months when Guido and I organised our visit in 2009. Entering the park Guido pointed out to me how poorly managed and vandalized it all was. A fountain, cast in glass and iron was partially broken and its exposed skeleton was surrounded by a protective barrier to guard visitors against the potential of its imminent topple. Nearby
the fountain stood another structure, half-constructed and supposedly intended to be a food stall, but which was as yet unused and defaced with spray paints. These elements, according to Guido, were symptoms of the contradictions and a lack of vision for the whole project. These structures engaged with the perceptions of this park and were able to materialize the inefficiencies of the institutional management of public infrastructures in the area. On a second level the lack of maintenance for this kind of public structures and their abandonment created another contrast in the different projected realities of this place. This contrast between the informal uses of the abandoned structures of the park and their imagined management was embodied by the temporality of the park, which existed as an in-between project, half realized, semi-abandoned and defiantly vandalized, surrounded by the new residential housing and by the construction site. The contrasting elements presented in this first part of the walk with Guido provide a useful reflection for understanding how practices of contrastive imagination can be ethnographically engaged.

Figure 9.5: A map of the new play-area in the park (the unrealised part of the project is in grey)
From the park, Guido proposed we continue our walk directly into the construction site, to explore the unfinished area of the park. Here the contrast between the finished and unfinished nature of the area offered a peculiar composition inspiring our discussion (see Figure 9.5). This was the area leading to where the road would start to elevate in order to pass the railway, an action against which the contestation of the committee was particularly insistent. As the quickest way to exit the park, we walked through an open fence that had been displaced to leave enough space to squeeze through the construction site quite easily. The walk then continued within the construction site, following a path created by the movements of people from one site to the other. The flexibility of the construction site opens up the place to a configuration that was viewed by my guide as an outcome not of a transportation planning logic, but of a much more opaque relationship that planners and politicians have created. The protective element of the fences displaced by the movements of the people passing through create a negotiated space within the construction site. The site as an outcome is thus at the same time a place for the activist to generate an understanding of a process that they otherwise could not fully condition. It is in this sense that the construction site can be understood as a technology of imagination (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen, 2009) more than a mere device for ordering and controlling space. While the committee cannot fully condition the logic of planning proposed and implemented for the site the contrasting vistas offer a generative capacity for imagining politics and planning. It is these relations and practices of imagination that inform the construction site as an anthropological place. In the next chapters I further explore this imaginative capacity of place in relation to other spheres of planning and politics in the neighbourhood.
Figure 9.6: Broken fences dividing the park from the construction site

Figure 9.7: A natural path that from the park leads across the construction site
Following Guido in the walk we reach a temporary path on Castellamare Street connecting Quarto Oggiaro with the southern side of the area. This street is curvilinear, narrow and with no pedestrian sidewalk. High speed cars make this path potentially dangerous and scary. Surrounded by the construction site and some temporary fences, I feel disoriented. After few metres we reach a temporary roundabout. “Here”, Guido tells me, “will become a hub for the mobility”. The logic of the fences again here seems unclear. Partially, they create traces on the delimited area for the vehicles to move but their instability and poor maintenance makes it difficult for me to recognise the street I had known within the mess. My disorientation in this part of the neighbourhood makes it more difficult in that moment to understand the trajectories of the temporal road and imagine how the mobility would have changed the area after the end of the construction site. Here the temporality of the street and the displacement created by the disposition of fences is where the question of scale emerges from within the landscape. The accessibility of urban space articulated by the fences is acting as a temporary structure of emplacement for the
project. In this way, the disorder created by the fences can be imagined as functional to the reorganisation of space to be imposed with the new road. As the new plans appear to produce more disorder, the perceived disorder becomes productive of order (Weszkalnys 2007: 226).

Figure 9.9: The temporary roundabout
Figure 9.10: Via Castellammare, a temporary road sign

Figure 9.11: Fences closing the access to the new road
Following my guide on, he took me toward the railway line, the infrastructural border of the area where a street and a few isolated houses delimit a closed road behind the park. We now enter the area coloured in grey on the new park’s public map (see figure 9.5 for the map and figures 9.6, 9.7, 9.8 for the entrance in this grey zone). The works onto this area of the park were still to be completed. The street name is Porretta and my guide
informs me that it was probably one of the oldest streets in the area, as it existed even before the construction of Quarto Oggiaro. On one side of the street, the railway closes the area, the train line connecting the external suburbs of Milano with the centre; on the other side of the road, two old houses. “Here”, Guido said to me, “was the countryside”. The remaining buildings (see figures 9.13, 9.14, 9.15, 9.16) are probably all that remains of the old Cascina Porretta, a farmhouse mentioned in the old maps of the area before the 1950s. After this group of houses starts what Guido calls “the new Porretta Street”. Here again, some fences delimit a construction site. Behind the fences it is possible to see the new street crossing around and an empty area where pavement and sewage systems are ready for the building of new houses. Other spaces surrounding the construction site seem like old, abandoned areas. These empty spots, where still nothing has yet been built, I was told are “waiting for a convenient destination”. Guido presents to me the fences closing or leaving open to view and access like places open to different strategic opportunities that the surrounding area promises to offer. The topography and names of each street and locality offer an example of the entangled nature of the constitution of place. The photographs presented as part of the documentation of the last section of our walk (see figures 9.17, 9.18, 9.19, 9.20) offer a series of examples of the temporal, material and spatial composition of this landscape. Here, different architectural features, often falling within the category of informal and vernacular architecture, co-exist with the new developments of the neighborhood and the partially-abandoned areas. Within this co-existence I believe that the meaning of the construction site is anticipated in the transformation of usage, delimitations and signaling of the area. Doors, windows, fences, house numbers and construction site signs create an informal composition for this place, bringing together order and disorder, public and private works. The private owners of these built and unbuilt zones, and the institutions developing the rest of the site, are evidently involved in redefining the character of the Poretta area. At the time of my visit, elements of the rural past were still act, together with new planning initiatives, as an anticipation of the future. The wild vegetation and landscape enclosed within some of the Poretta fences is thus indicative of this contrasting temporality. Such tensions are associated with the assembled materiality of the construction site and its interaction with the nearby areas. This is possible to see in figure 9.19, where a fence and postbox are
constructed from materials which constitute remnants of an agricultural past. Objects such as this are often assembled using recycled pieces and do not follow any predetermined style or procedural layout. This hotchpotch creative use of materials is in stark contrast to the fences erected by the construction site (figure 9.18) which follow the policies and communication procedures necessary for such public works. The private fenced area also still contains the type of landscape that, before the opening of the Gronda Nord construction site, characterised the whole south area of Quarto Oggiaro, dividing the social housing estate from the petro-chemical refinery (see Figure 9.20). The construction site and its experience by residents like Guido is not positioned within the histories of the place as a necessarily linear progression, but one that comes through a series of negotiation and contestations.

Figure 9.13: Old farm house in Porretta Street
Figure 9.14: Renewed farm house in Porretta Street
Figure 9.15: Old farm house in Porretta Street

Figure 9.16: Old farm house in Porretta Street
The fences in the three examples mentioned over the course of this short walk embody a series of characteristics of the construction site as a space for different imagined times. These different temporalities in their emplaced expression were perceivable during the walk and are producers of order and disorder as intertwined categories for the complementary reinvention of place. The event of the construction site articulates its emplacement of design through contrasting vision and the imposition of the logic of multiple temporality. It is exactly through the engagement of different geographical and temporal scales that the construction site is thus continually reconstituted as a place. Like Guido, the role of committee members entails following, extracting and unfolding these scales by adopting different explanations and forms of knowledge. This method of extracting meaning from the construction site is therefore similar to the way anthropologists aim to unfold macro-processes within the everyday life of a particular place. Presenting my work, this anthropological duty is articulated, not as a prerogative of the researcher, but as a collaborative possibility that can be used to generate a multiplicity of contrasting vistas. These prove central for composing place as a result of different shifts in scale through negotiated configuration.
Figure 9.17: The construction site in the new Porretta Street

Figure 9.18: The construction site in the new Porretta Street
Figure 9.19: Area to be redeveloped in Via Porretta

Figure 9.20: Area to be redeveloped in Via Porretta
Summary

In presenting the walk in this chapter, I have discussed ethnographically two main elements as central to the unfolding of place: multiple temporalities and the relevance of scale for its composition. These theoretical claims are not proposed as an analytical assumption but have been informed and guided in the course of the configuration of the walk as a collaborative endeavour built around a negotiation of interests, trust and aims between the researcher and their interlocutors. The dialogue that is created within this configuration is central for the constitution of anthropological knowledge and in the context of my research for making sense of how place is unfolded. During the walk with a local resident around a contested construction site, I could explore how this constitution could be discussed and engaged as part of a process of collaborative knowing. In the context of a large scale contested construction site, our walk is indeed a partial and arbitrary composition of place. At the same time, the partiality of the walk opened up fragments of place, bringing together what was otherwise left. These are indeed “anthropological places”. The walk presented in this chapter is just one section of multiple encounters that need to be positioned within our strategy for understanding place. In my case the construction site could be specifically discussed in terms of technological engagement with the imaginative practices of contestation, as well as with the function of connecting and disconnecting different existing (or planned) elements of the neighbourhood and city. This approach to ethnographic walking provided an understanding of the forms of disengagement and un-relationality that are articulated within a planning controversy. Leading me through different vistas, Guido’s tour built a shared interpretation of the place as well as of the different kind of transformations it was engaged in. Walking and temporarily inhabiting these transformations with Guido offered the opportunity for us to generate a series of explanations for the project, at a time when its outcome could not yet be clearly considered.
Chapter 10: Electoral presence, housing property and the composition of place

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the shaping, expansion and redefinition of the political sphere is informed by the interplay between electoral and protest practices. In particular, my interest is in how politics addresses different neighbourhood controversies and how these are managed in the course of the electoral campaign. I show how these events engage and further mobilise issues of planning contestation and controversies at different scales, in particular between local, regional and national levels. In this context, a heterogeneous composition of subjects and groups are involved in a process of expansion and redefinition of politics. My analysis is built on a series of ethnographic narratives in the context of the Milanese neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro. In particular I focus on how the pre-electoral period is experienced in that specific neighbourhood. I scrutinise different activities, meetings and events that reflected the tensions and expectations arising from Milanese politics, which ultimately expanded the definition of politics and made it complementary to the domain of planning and public bureaucracy.

Expanding politics: elections, protests and urban strategies across places

Preparation for the local elections in May 2011 created public reaction in broad grassroots participation and campaigning, marking a sea change in the direction of Milanese politics. In this chapter, I argue that this also triggered an opportunity for re-composition between the subjects and groups involved in various planning and administrative controversies. I therefore propose to examine the ways in which electoral politics can be viewed as expanding and shifting the significance of politics in everyday life in Quarto Oggiaro. Through presenting how local politics is experienced within multiple scales and levels, I aim to outline how such scales participate in the shaping of what politics is and does. Taking into serious consideration the practices and discourses of my informants in the
field, I propose a review of the borders of politics within the multiple scales of the *periferia* neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro in Milan.

My analysis in this chapter focuses in particular on the left-wing side of the political spectrum, where greatly-anticipated public meetings with politicians and activists were organised in order to decide on the councillor candidate for the city of Milan. These meetings provided plenty of scope for me to observe those of my informants who were invited to contribute and also facilitated the opportunity for me to hear about and meet other local campaigners active in other controversies. The winning candidate from this preliminary stage would attempt to break the 20-year right-wing domination of the city council by challenging the incumbent city mayor during the May 2011 elections\(^26\). In the city council, the left had been in opposition since the scandals of 1992, when the socialist party that had run the city and the national government for almost a decade sank into a series of accusations of corruption, which resulted in the end of the then Italian political establishment. Since 1992, the city of Milan had been a right-wing stronghold. For almost 20 years both the city council and the regional government of Lombardy saw *Lega Nord* and Berlusconi’s party as main political players in the broader metropolitan and regional area. During this period the left could only maintain a degree of influence by running the Province of Milan between 1995 and 1999, then again between 2004 and 2009. The serving mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti had won the last election by a clear majority 5 years before, and implemented several flagship projects for transforming the city during her administration. Notably, these included establishing a new Business Fair Centre outside the city, in the bordering Municipalities of Rho and Pero, north-west of Milan. During three consecutive right-wing administrations, the new campus for both the Milan Polytechnic and the University of Milan were created in the northern *periferia* neighbourhoods of Bovisa and Bicocca, respectively. During Moratti’s term in office, Milan was also a candidate for the World Expo Fair in 2015. Winning this bid in an international

---

\(^26\) Letizia Moratti, belonging to Silvio Berlusconi’s People’s Freedom Party, had been Mayor of Milan since 2006 when she took over from another of Berlusconi’s candidates, Gabriele Albertini, who had remained in the same role for two legislations from 1997 to 2006. Both Mayors were connected with powerful Milanese families, linked to traditional high society, industry and finance. They were also trusted allies and early members of Silvio Berlusconi’s party which, through them, managed to maintain a strong grip of continuity on Milanese politics during the period between 1997 and 2010.
competition with the city of Smirne in Turkey, the Moratti administration, backed by Romano Prodi’s left wing parliamentary government coalition, could lay claim to having facilitated a great opportunity for Milan to shine on the global stage. Throughout this 20-year period of government, the right-wing political coalition, composed of an alliance between the People of Freedom Party and *Lega Nord*, relied on strong support from Berlusconi’s national government (between 1994 and 1995, 2001 and 2006, and 2008 and 2011). It also had the support of regional governor Roberto Formigoni, who was of a similar political persuasion and held office from 1995 to 2010. These strong interconnections between metropolitan, regional and national governments reinforced a series of established business and political alliances that can be described by adopting the concept of urban regimes, which I anticipated in Chapter 2.

In 2011 the main left wing parties agreed to present a mutually satisfactory candidate for the seat of mayor. An open consultation was held to establish the candidates and from this, three contenders emerged for the role. All three candidates obtained support from the three main areas of the Italian left: communist-environmentalist, left democrats and Christian left. The three left parties, PD, SEL and PRC\(^\text{27}\), agreed to hold a coalition election for the candidate and decided to combine their support for this candidate afterwards. Two candidates were experienced lawyers (one constitutionalist and one with a private studio) and the third was a famous architect and professor at the *Politecnico di Milano*. In the six months preceding the administrative elections, local political and social groups rallied support for left-wing candidates by organising meetings with citizens living in their constituencies. These meetings allowed candidates to explain their intentions and provided an opportunity for citizens to bring their concerns to the attention of the politicians. This process of consultation, along with its element of grassroots campaigning within Milanese neighbourhoods, proves particularly relevant in understanding not only the articulation of local politics, but also the ways in which urban controversies and planning contestations are translated and embodied within the political realm.

\(^{27}\) PD (*Partito Democratico*) were the main Italian left wing party formed in 2007 by the merging of the heirs of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and part of the Christian Democrats (DC). SEL and PRC are two much smaller groups emerging after the end of the PCI and maintaining a more radical left orientation.
The organisation of the administrative election in the city of Milan and how this was articulated in the pre-electoral ballots for candidates is also important when considering the multiple scales they took place within. Together with the election of all 48 members of the city council, the election was set to renew the 9 local councils that, in a system similar to London’s boroughs, would be responsible for running neighbourhood services and setting budgets. These local councils, known as consigli di zona, were originally formed in the 1980s as part of a local government reform to promote wider participation with political institutions. Initially numbering 20 in total, the number of these zones was later reduced to 9. Each zone elected approximately 40 members of the council, and one president. These multiple scales of local politics, and the system of preliminary election, fuelled an expanding number of candidates and activists throughout the city. The system for selecting candidates, though nominally open to everyone, was still viewed as dominated by traditional party organisations; although external candidates were invited to apply, local sections of the main left wing parties often decided which to support and usually selected internally. At the same time many other organisations, such as neighbourhood committees, NGOs, cultural groups and subjects generally part of civil society broadened political participation by running as independent candidates. In the entanglement of these multiple levels of politics, the different scales and connections between political and non-political subjects and groups became increasingly significant.

Meetings of political presence: the composition of place through pre-electoral effects

The political composition of Milanese elections at the neighbourhood level can be analysed in terms of composition of place. In this way, politics is continuously redefined through forms of engagement and disengagement and ultimately place-making practices. Focusing on the multiple levels of local politics in Milan, in the following section I present how practices of electoral political composition evolved along different scales in the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro. During the first weeks of fieldwork I attended some
pre-election meetings with left-wing candidates, where I discussed my research with organisers belonging to the three main parties of the left wing coalitions, namely the PD (Democrat Party), Rifondazione Comunista (RC) and SEL (Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà: Left, Ecology and Freedom). I particularly restricted my attention to the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro in the north-west of the city, an area with a population of about 50,000 inhabitants; it constituted an important electoral area within Milan, because of its large population and its rich grassroots base of organisations. The area was initially a self-contained electoral zone, but later combined with 3 other large bordering neighbourhoods as part of the Zona 8. Attending some preparatory meetings organised in the neighbourhood by several left-wing candidates, I had the opportunity to take part in public discussions and engage with the political process that anticipated the elections of May 2011.

The first meeting I attended was organised by the left-wing environmentalist party SEL. The main component of the meeting was the presence of the official candidate for the SEL party, Giuliano Pisapia. The group was created in 2009 following a split from the PRC (party of the communist re-foundation – Partito di Rifondazione Comunista), and after some success in several Italian regions, it affirmed itself as the most relevant radical left-wing group in parliament, as well in some large Italian cities and regions. At the meeting Giuliano Pisapia’s presentation was introduced by the local SEL committee and then followed by a Q&A with members of the public attending. During this Q&A different neighbourhood groups spoke up to describe what their problems were, and how Pisapia could help them to address these issues from his political platform. The meeting was organised in a space known as Circolo Ricreativo Meazza, in the Quarto Oggiaro neighbourhood. This choice of meeting-place reflects the political complexity of its location in relation to the neighbourhood, both past and present. The space was once the local branch of the Italian socialist party, then became a social club with a campo di bocce (bowling green) and a dance hall where traditional musical evenings were regularly held. Photos of Italian socialist and communist leaders still hang on the walls alongside original Italian Socialist Party (PSI) posters. During the evening different members of the audience, whom I later learned the organisers had privately invited, asked candidates how they would help with problems regarding poverty, debt and the lack of well-
maintained social housing in the neighbourhood. The candidates in turn addressed these issues, aiming to show the audience how the success of their candidacy could improve conditions in the neighbourhood and responded to the individual concerns raised by audience members. Collaboration and engagement in this sense are not just elements of my own methodological and theoretical framework but can be seen as shaping and informing the expectations of my interlocutors. Upon introducing myself to some of the event organisers at the end of the presentation, they expressed an interest in my research, and invited me to participate in a second public meeting they had planned in the neighbourhood.

The composition of neighbourhood politics in the above vignette reflects the historical and political geography of place. The emerging configurations of the meetings are always uncertain, even if the organisers attempt to control the potential disruption that those assemblies may bring forward. The role of the candidate in the course of the meeting is one of a mediator between different expectations and imaginations of the future. Candidates, as anticipators of unexpected outcomes, engender a particular style of imaginative effects (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen, 2009, p.19). Those effects are not pre-determined or fixed within the configuration of place, but should be continuously reviewed following what the above authors call the exploration of “technologies of imagination” as an inquiry into “the conditions under which unconditioned outcomes come about” (ibid.). In this way, the “unexpected outcomes” (ibid.) of the configuration of politics reflects the uneven potentialities of place. Even when politics is fully embedded within institutional and electoral frameworks, the possibility of success and failure act as a reminder of both the representative nature of democracy and the more disruptive and chaotic element of grassroots movements. A second meeting I attended offered a further explanation of how this element in the politics of place needs to be taken into account and how it is relevant to understanding collaborative approaches to anthropological engagement. The second meeting was held in a smaller venue, the basement of a social housing block where an ANPI association (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia, The National Association of the Italian Partisans28) had their local branch in Quarto Oggiaro.

28 This is the main association of the participants in the Italian resistance against the fascist and Nazi occupation during World War II.
The Quarto Oggiaro ANPI branch was decorated with banners and photographs hung on the walls to document the visual memories of antifascist resistance. The section name was dedicated to two communist partisans from Quarto Oggiaro who had sacrificed their lives fighting in the mountains to the north of Lombardy against the Nazi fascist army. It was within this context of Italian -and also Quarto Oggiarian - history that two candidates for the SEL party presented their “local” candidates for the city and zona councils. The main candidate running for a place in the city council opened his presentation with an informative slideshow, with which he tried to explain the potential impact of the urban transformation proposed by the right-wing government of the city. Maps and visual material were used to show where these projects would be located and the different impacts they might produce upon the neighbourhood. These impacts were presented in terms of pollution, noise and the economic value of the local housing market (see Figures 10.1, 10.2, 10.3). Similarly to the discussion of the Gronda Nord controversy in the previous two chapters, technical and planning laws and terminology were politically critiqued in the course of the meeting. The candidate, who had previously been a member of the city council, provided an overview of the projects and results of almost 20 years of uninterrupted right wing governments in Milan. This candidate’s focus was on the failures of these governments in addressing the needs of the neighbourhood in Quarto Oggiaro as well as in other external neighbourhoods of Milan. However, this attempt to address the recent history and proposed future for the Milanese periferia was not necessarily the overriding reason why people attended the meeting. It was more evident than at the previous meeting, that the potential of pre-electoral politics as a conduit for the composition and the anticipation of “unexpected outcomes” (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen, 2009, p. 19) became clear towards the end of the presentations. The centrality of the meeting-place is also to be understood as an arena for multiple spatial and temporal trajectories (Massey 2005, p. 12) where past and present are continuously re-imagined in terms of events, contingency and negotiations.
Figure 10.1: Slide1 from SEL presentation. Courtesy of Valter Molinaro.

Figure10.2: Slide2 from SEL presentation. Courtesy of Valter Molinaro.
After the candidates finished their prepared interventions, the meeting became focused on a particular issue, one not initially included in the politicians’ lists of discussions. A small group of tenants from a nearby social housing complex in Quarto Oggiaro asked to speak publicly about a dispute they had with the Municipality of. As one of them explained, their social housing complex, known as the torri (towers), was located in the nearby Via Lessona. This complex is home to approximately 2,000 residents, spread across 6 high-rises that are Quarto Oggiaro’s tallest buildings. The gloomy tone with which these tenants voiced their unhappy situation radically altered the mood and language of an evening, which had hitherto focused on the reassuring sentiment that the political candidates understood all the issues facing their constituents, and had numerous plans in place to bring these matters under control. Explaining their dispute as well as the current status of their insecurity, the tenants projected a different range of expectations and desires than were advanced within the realm of politics. In order to unfold and examine the reasons for their disillusionment with the current politics in Milan and beyond, further details about the origins of their dispute was needed. The status of the ownership
of the *torri* was in the process of being privatised after 20 years of public management, and this was one of the main elements of controversy at the meeting. The towers had been property of the municipality of Milan until September 2010, and housed a mix of residents ranging from low-income families, public workers and the disabled. Recently the municipality had decided to sell the property to a private French bank, BNP Paribas, together with several other public properties. This operation was presented as an attempt by the municipality to appear financially stable in order to obtain the World Expo Fair from the International Bureau. It was not until after the financial transaction had gone through that the residents were informed about their houses being sold to a private bank. In a letter sent to each of them from the municipality, they were given 90 days to decide what action to take. This situation divided the tenants between those who could afford to buy their apartment at the ‘market price’ and the majority who couldn’t. In describing this situation, several tenants gave their accounts of the dreadful choice they were asked to make. Several of them could not buy as they were not in a financially secure position to apply for a mortgage and were lacking any other support. This situation was made more serious by the deficient level of maintenance in which the Municipality had left the flats and their facilities. As a result of the necessity to reduce the value of those buildings before the sale, several parts of the complex were in a state of abandonment. It is in this context that the tenants at the meeting invited the attendants and the organisers to acknowledge this situation directly.

The account of the tenants’ expectations and worries is as an example of the tensions and contradictions emerging from Milanese urban governance. It is in relation to those tensions that the candidates performed in their capacities as mediators. The tenants at the meeting felt abandoned by Milanese administrators and politicians. Their intervention thus transformed an electoral presentation in Quarto Oggiaro from a detached and technical explanation of Milanese planning history and future, into a more dynamic event. In accusing politicians and governors of ignoring their problems against a backdrop of general troubles in the *periferia*, the tenants’ sense of abandonment was directed at both left and right wing parties. Somehow the political presentation of the candidates had been spontaneously redirected into an engaged discussion, where the politicians had to demonstrate their capacity to accommodate and appropriately respond to the issues
raised by their constituents. At the same time the politicians in the meeting were told by the group of tenants that other politicians from the opposite side, namely the *Lega Nord* (a party belonging to the government coalition) had already been informed and petitioned for help and advice. The ambiguity of a situation, where politicians of different sides are requested to intervene in a specific and often controversial issue, is not new among urban social movements. Della Porta and Diani (2004, pp 115) refer to such instances as elements that distinguish local committees from structured environmental associations. While the former are chiefly interested in obtaining the best deal regarding their own requests, an environmental association might aim for larger scale results. In this case, the informal committee demonstrated its ability to be heard publicly and enter into negotiation directly with politicians. What still remains missing from Della Porta and Diani`s analysis, and which I aim to further embellish, are the relationships that, over the course of the negotiations, are firmly embedded within `place`. By looking at the events that occurred in the aftermath of this meeting, I claim that a place-based understanding of these controversies complements the categorical subdivision between local committees, and regional and national organisations. Through analysis of how the controversy evolved within the neighbourhood, I trace and engage with the scales that such protests inhabit, as well as how these actions may produce new, perhaps unexpected, relationships and connections with places.

**Encountering, visiting and documenting a property**

The urgency of the controversy regarding the *Lessona* Towers, presented in the above accounts, reveals how the composition of place cannot be grasped if not positioned as a political process. The meeting was held in October 2010, roughly a month after tenants received the letter instructing them to make a decision about their accommodation. Within this time-frame, the contestation clarified the significance of politics, both at the local and broader scales. The delay and expansion of the time-frame of the controversy indicates how the aims of the committees often rests in their ability to shift a contestation beyond the immediacy of the present and across different political and legal stages. An
examination of these dynamics broadens the ways in which we understand such controversies as part of the composition of place within Quarto Oggiaro and beyond. In the meeting, the candidates acknowledged that until May 2011, the date of the administrative election in Milan, their role would be limited. At the same time, they assured tenants that they would try to secure more information about the situation and the possibilities of intervention on the tenants’ behalf; the candidates also suggested contacting one of the tenant unions in order to build a united front with other similar situations in Milan. This redefines not merely how institutional politics is involved in the process of expansion of the contestation, but also in mobilising the capacities of place. Viola, one of the attendees at the meeting would play a central role in the development of my engagement with this contestation. She lived in Quarto Oggiaro and volunteered for a number of local grassroots organisations. In recent times she had also created a neighbourhood website called “Quartoweb”, which published news and events happening in Quarto Oggiaro. After the end of the meeting, she asked the tenants if she could write an article about their situation. As she knew I would also be interested in following these issues, she asked me to join her while she met with those tenants, to visit their homes.

Our visit to the towers, a few days after our meeting, commenced with a walk in the underground area of the building where the garages and car parks were located. In this area, large water leaks penetrated the ground level, leaving the walls and the floors completely wet for the majority of the year. Puddles were everywhere and half of the car parks, the ones most affected by water infiltration, had been closed down for safety reasons after a series of complaints to the municipality. On one wall, graffiti accused the banks and municipality of being thieves (see Figure 10.8). While I was taking pictures and listening to what the different inhabitants had to say, Viola was documenting the visit with her video camera, as she intended to produce a video for "Quartoweb". Upon seeing her engaged in this, many passers-by asked if we were journalists and added how necessary they felt it was to document the critical condition of their housing. We were shown the fragility of the construction and the damage to floors and parts of the stairs caused by water leaks in the building. We then accepted the invitation to record the interior of the houses. In his flat on the sixth floor, the father of a family that had moved there in the early 1980s showed us internal air conditioning tubes and told us how these had been
manufactured from asbestos, but were only closed down recently, without any maintenance or health and safety checks. Another tenant, a pensioner, showed us how his respiratory condition required him to use a machine that supported his breathing while he slept. It was within this framework, working in collaboration with a local activist, that actually helped me learn how I could deal with the expectations of the people Viola and I were interviewing and the necessity to detach from this engagement. Allowing Viola to conduct the majority of the interviews with the inhabitants of the houses meant I could observe and more effectively learn how the suffering experienced by these inhabitants was connected to the different scales within which activism is produced and performed. In this way, my role was not one of merely the fly-on-the-wall, but also rooted in collaborative engagement.

Figure 10.4: A view of the Towers from the outside
Figure 10.5: Interviewing one resident outside the towers

Figure 10.6: Graffiti in the car park area of the Lessona Towers. Translation: “Leaks, Asbestos, Cracks, this is the mugging of the Towers”
Figure 10.7: Underground car park

Figure 10.8: Graffiti in the car park area of the Lessona Towers. Translation: "Municipality + BNP thieves with a shared plan".
Figure 10.9: Recent external paint falling down due to humidity

Figure 10.10: Visiting the towers concierge

Figure 10.11: Visiting a home in the tower
Linking the housing condition of the inhabitants with her knowledge of the legislation covering their tenancies and social housing rights, Viola was far more able than myself to connect with the people we were documenting. Indeed, through observing her I began to appreciate the ‘tricks of the trade’ that an activist in Quarto Oggiaro could make use of. Viola had been born in Quarto Oggiaro, and had years of involvement in several local activist groups. Her mother was a housing unionist and in the 1970s her father had been active in neighbourhood political groups. Viola herself was a PRC candidate in the previous election, and participated in local committees against the Gronda Nord, as well as other grassroots and volunteering activities in Quarto Oggiaro. Recently she had decided to abandon her political activism with the PRC party to focus more on community and neighbourhood groups, for these had proved to be more successful than electoral politics and she personally found this type of engagement more rewarding. After our visit, Viola put together the documentation we had produced and condensed all the footage into a 10-minute long edited video of our visit. Initially I attempted to produce a short article from my notes, but a significant correction in the “style” of this report had to be made by Viola before publishing. My report was, in her view, “too political” and she had to adapt my rather sympathetic approach as it was expected that it would be read by individuals holding a broad spectrum of political views. In this case, it was shown to me how electoral politics was closely entangled with neighbourhood tensions and contrasts more than might usually be perceived when looking broadly at the metropolitan scale. At the same time, the possibilities offered by a place-based approach that was supported by my residential research amplified the potential for collaborative work. In this situation, siding with Viola and the tenants protesting against the privatisation of their homes, I had to rapidly learn and absorb the complexity of Milanese politics in the local context and beyond, thus understanding the sensibilities mobilised by this mode of activism. After the corrections, Viola put the contents online and send it to her contacts, of whom she had more than 2,000. At the same time the video was posted on her Facebook profile and

29 The video, in Italian, is available online at the following address: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAMmB2IBNAs
shared with her friends and my own, including the profiles of local associations and groups she was involved in. The day after these contents were shared, different reactions occurred; some local politicians from PD, SEL and PRC appreciated the writing and asked to be kept informed about the issue, and some offered to meet us for an interview. One of the tenants who guided us around called personally to thank me for the video and the article. Some local magazines requested permission to republish “our” story, which we agreed to. I was reinvigorated and inspired by the visit and the outcome it created, but soon afterwards, this positive feedback was countered by a somewhat different kind of reaction.

Together with the expansion of the capacities of collaborative research, my engagement with this dispute forced me to consider the necessary ambiguities and potentialities of this method of approaching place. The administrator of the social housing complex and management committee sent a harsh email to Quartoweb claiming the representation of the situation suggested by the article was incorrect and that the true story was altogether different. We were accused of doing our job inadequately for we should have contacted them in advance. Viola was disappointed by this criticism and proposed a second visit to the building with the administrators present so we could publish a follow-up report. In the interim, we rearticulated this story from more perspectives, and conducted interviews with local politicians and housing union leaders. I felt motivated by these discussions and by the possibility of realising a form of collaboration in the field a few months after my arrival, even if this was not the issue that I planned to directly engage. A few days later, we met with the self-management committee comitato di autogestione, in their office in the concierge of the towers. Viola again conducted much of the interview. The committee members were regularly elected every 5 years by the towers’ 250 residents, and were responsible for managing some works for the maintenance of the housing, and making contact with the municipality regarding all other matters. A committee had been in place since the initial assignation of the housing and therefore had to be considered a positive management example for this “model” of social housing. The committee’s role was central to the events connected with the change in ownership of the towers and their sale. They explained to us that the group who had contacted us for the first article was composed of people from the previous self-management committee. The chair of the committee, a
retired regional government official, explained to us what happened when this property shift occurred. She recalled how one night she received a call on her mobile phone from an ex-colleague who was a top management official in the regional government, informing her of the municipality’s intention to include the property in a financial transaction that would make the budget of the municipality appear healthier for the assignation of the World Expo to Milan. That night she said she stayed up until dawn revising the document, making sure that the conditions of the sale respected regional and national standards for this kind of transaction.

That the committee managed to adapt and produce results out of an unexpected event demonstrates how the controversies are strictly related to the composition of place. By considering a series of objections and contrasting visions it was then possible for me to reflect more widely upon the factors affecting the controversy. The capacity of committee members to deal with unexpected events is indeed central to forming an understanding of their role within the controversy. In positioning themselves near to the centre of decisions and eventually being capable of obtaining desired outcomes, they strongly stressed their willingness to avoid misrepresentations. It was in relation to their account of the event that our reconstruction failed to produce their expected results. A second article stemming from this discussion was published in the local neighbourhood newsletter in February 2011, to compensate for the first contested article. Again after the publication of the article, however, public reaction followed. On this occasion, the former committee members accused us of not reporting the truth and that the self-management committee’s claims were motivated by a desire to protect their own interests. They were very disappointed in us, for we had gained their trust. One of the tenants, Francesca, who had invited us for the first visit, called Viola on her mobile to complain to her directly. Following on from this, Viola received more calls and emails from disappointed people. When Viola met with me later she concluded that she could no longer continue to follow the towers case, as she did not feel the tenants were able to find a common voice amongst themselves, and if they were unable to reconcile their internal conflict, she did not feel she could help them. How many perspectives were necessary for me to include and take into consideration in order to sensitively engage with the controversy? What kind of balance could I locate between the different and apparently contrasting views that this
controversy produced within the tenants of the tower, as well as the broader networks where they were included? These questions, as well as the necessity to position my work in relation to the issues raised by the tenants, are further explored in the following accounts of the controversy.

Assembling the tenants: unions, divisions and affiliations

A few days after the publication of our second article, Viola and I were informed about a public meeting organised by the non-official committee of residents of the towers. This was a gathering called by the group Viola and I had met at the SEL candidates’ presentation, and that had vehemently contested the decision to sell the property. As we learned during the course of our journalistic pursuit, this group was also formed in contestation to the officially elected committee that stood accused of accepting the conditions proposed by the municipality. My account of this assembly, and the long discussion that followed later that evening, aims to present the composition of the controversy as a form of collaboration and engagement with unexpected outcomes, more than simply as a negotiation of the best deal for the contestants. It is in this context that controversies of this sort are normally understood as a localised opportunity to comprehend the relationship between place and politics.

The assembly was called in the auditorium of the De Roberto Church, the largest hall in the neighbourhood, with capacity for almost 300 people. At the meeting a group of approximately 100 residents of the towers were present and a list of speakers from the main housing unions were invited to make an appearance. Before the meeting began, I noticed some of the residents I had met on my first visit to the flats and who had later complained about our second article. As the objections to the second article had resulted in Viola’s decision to cease following the case, and in so doing had left me alone to deal with the issue, I started to feel uneasy about my position. Knowing the difficult conditions under which this group of residents were contesting the decision of the municipality, I was aware that any form of intervention would almost certainly provoke a series of objections
by the other committee. At the same time, having seen me for the first time in association with Viola, and on the occasion of the publication of a series of articles on the issue, several residents now assumed my role to be one of a journalist or local activist. My attempts to clarify that I was not a journalist, but a student and an academic researcher were not often clearly understood. Under the unpredictable umbrella of controversies between different groups of tenants, institutions and political groups, suspicions about who was writing what and why were obviously shared by some of the most active members in the dispute. For these reasons, as I sat on my own towards the front, I opted not to take any pictures of the presentation, and instead took notes about the speakers and various interventions discussed.

The meeting was introduced by one of the residents who had accompanied myself and Viola around during our visit. Right away, the aim of reaching a mutual agreement about the privatisation of the towers was presented as the main expected outcome of the evening. Three external speakers were introduced and allowed approximately 20 or 30 minutes to discuss their proposals for the residents. The three speakers represented the main housing unions in Milan: Sunia, Sicet and Unione Inquilini. The interventions were specifically concerned with communicating the legal and political framework defining the selling of public housing, both in Milan and Lombardy. The final speaker concluded the first round of interventions stating that the intention of his union was not to impose a position, but to give tenants a series of tools and forms of professional support in order to ensure tenant autonomy, to develop their own process of contestation. In discussion with the tenants, the union members used a language of technical expertise regarding the way social housing is managed in Italy. It was by specifically utilising this language that their collaboration could be thought of as relevant and conceivable. The debate that followed used a different vocabulary, based on lived experiences in the flats. Some tenants, more favourable to the idea of buying a house, were interested in obtaining a better and fairer deal, while others, clearly not able to afford such an investment, were keen to find a political solution that would halt the whole operation of privatising the Towers. During the Q&A, one member of the public described how he had moved into his flat when he had first married 30 years ago, and how since then he had had sons and was now a grandfather. Despite 30 years of paying rent for his property he was now expected to
obtain a mortgage to buy a flat requiring considerable maintenance, but valued at a market price of approximately 1,800 euros per square metre. From his (and the other tenants) perspective, they had already paid enough for their homes and felt they deserved better treatment by the institutions.

The existing contrasts between the residents during the meeting were not just perceived as the result of personal experiences, but were also directly connected with the political framework that generated this situation. One member of the public remarked how the responsibility for this controversy should be accepted by the two main parties in the government in the municipality of Milan and Region of Lombardy, namely Lega Nord and Berlusconi’s People of Freedom party. From this tenant’s perspective, those two parties, as also in power in the national administration in Rome, were responsible for modifying the legislation on social housing so that they could sell public property without prior consultation. How could the tenants contest this on-going strategy if they were not openly challenging this political project? The balance between the different positions and approaches to the resolution of the controversy opened up the meeting to a number of proposed interventions and suggestions for collaboration. The Q&A, which continued for at least one hour after the interventions of the unions, also brought into question the practical implications of how to reply to the legal procedures mobilised by the municipality in their cooperation with the new private owners of the property. Ultimately the unions were recognised by the assembly as the most effective contingent in dealing with those questions. Therefore, in order to effectively represent the tenants, a formal membership to the union was proposed at the end of the meeting for those willing to unite their contestation. Offering to represent the tenants in view of the political and administrative institutions, the union strategy regarding collaboration demonstrated the potential and capacities that controversies open up within place.

Meeting, discussing and disclosing the tension provoked by their experiences, the tenants had activated a series of contacts and encounters within the neighbourhood. It was precisely through this that their own dispute extended and shifted across different political and technical scales. This is, in part, a similar understanding to Della Porta and Diani’s (2004) views that local committees are mainly interested in obtaining the most effective
result out of a continuous engagement with different actors. By acknowledging the political and non-political claims that emerged from this protest, I aim to further explore the validity of Della Porta and Diani’s (2004) claims. The Towers tenants, in the course of their contestation, found themselves in a position of weakness, where the technical and legislative framework was changed in order to authorise the privatization of their houses. In this condition, their contestation could only be performed as part of a re-definition of the sphere of the political and its authority. The above account shows that we can position pre-electoral politics within the context of local as well as metropolitan politics and governance. At the same time, the contentious politics of urban social movement is continuously engaged in this redefinition. Aiming to open up a limited understanding of committee activism as a practice following the straightforward logic of obtaining the best possible deal, I traced how the composition of place is constituted through a series of collaborations and imagined futures produced during contestations. This understanding of place is particularly relevant when the protests are not simply organised in terms of legal and technical language. In the following account, it is precisely in this direction that I aim to explore the development of the controversy.

From the tower to the square: encountering protest politics

On 28th April 2011, the opening ceremony of a new community space in Quarto Oggiaro and the restoration of building facades in the piazza set the scene for the tenants’ protest. The opening was, in the view of the municipality, part of their strategy of requalifying the *periferia*, and the restoration included repainting building exteriors, smartening shop windows, repaving the square, and repairing its benches. For this event, the Mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti, was expected to make the inaugural speech. The news that the mayor would be coming to Quarto Oggiaro circulated in local mailing lists. Local NGOs and various associations were invited to attend, in order to take the opportunity of meeting with the mayor and perhaps raising their issues with her. The evening before, when I bumped into a towers tenant who was active in protesting their situation, I was informed of their intention to stage a protest during this event. In the morning, journalists and
photographers from both local and national newspapers had gathered. Local politicians and Milanese municipality officials organised the event, for which beverages and catering was provided, while policemen were visible patrolling the event perimeters. Despite the opinion that this event could be externally viewed as wholly marginal and only of secondary relevance for the whole election campaign, from a neighbourhood perspective this was central to how different candidates and local groups might establish relationships of trust and collaboration. In this context, again, the tendency of politicians to present themselves as mediators is seen as central to their anticipation of desired outcomes and maintaining control over unexpected situations.

The location where this political event was staged, Piazza Capuana, was not an average neighbourhood square and therefore requires a brief introduction. In the history of Quarto Oggiaro, Piazza Capuana had become an unofficial headquarter for drug-dealing and trafficking. During previous police interventions, the last in 2008, families living on the social housing estates facing onto Piazza Capuana protested in defence of those who had been arrested for criminal activities. Articles published in local and national newspapers covered these events, in a manner that depicted the whole neighbourhood as controlled by mafia and other criminal organisations. At the time of my arrival in the field there were only a few traces of this recent past. Significantly, one such remaining sign was some graffiti on the walls of the abandoned shops in Piazza Capuana, simply stating 'polizia infame' ('infamous police'). Most of the local associations working for the improvement of the neighbourhood repeatedly asked for this writing to be removed, but as it was always replaced, and the municipality had stopped attempting to get rid of it. As far as I remembered, similar graffiti had remained there since my first visit to the area in 2006. The redevelopment of Piazza Capuana included a full re-styling of the walls and redecoration of the square paving, as it was the municipality’s intention to positively alter public perceptions of the place. For days following the conclusion of the work and prior to its grand re-opening, the square was closed and surrounded by fences in order to prevent vandalism before the inaugural event. When I arrived on the morning of the opening, the police had almost finished dismantling the fences. A group of towers inhabitants were already waiting outside with their banners covered. They told me that more people would be attending. I approached some local activists and left-wing politicians I knew and they
told me that the appearance of the Mayor was no longer confirmed, for she was anticipating a protest presence. The centre-left party Partito Democratico had a branch in the square; they felt the municipality had ignored many of the unwelcome conditions experienced by the residents of the housing blocks and a banner in their window accused Moratti herself of not being credible, implying that the square restoration was a superficial political strategy for securing re-election (Figure 10.13).

Figure 10.12: Protesters from the Lessona Towers in Piazza Capuana during the opening celebration. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.
Figure 10.13: protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of the local PD branch window. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.

Figure 10.14: Local police observing the removal of the fences from Piazza Capuana before the official reopening. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.
Figure 10.15: Detail of Mariolina Moioli addressing the crowd. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.

Figure 10.16: The director of ACLI Lombardia introducing the project for Piazza Capuana. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April.
Figure 10.17: protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of the placards. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.

Figure 10.18: The protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of a photographer documenting the protest. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.
Figure 10.19: The protest in Piazza Capuana, detail of a photographer documenting the estate. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.

Figure 10.20: New benches and structures in Piazzetta Capuana. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.
Figure 10.21: The protest in Piazza Capuana, the politician Mariolina Moioli visiting the internal garden of the social housing estates in Piazza Capuana with local activists. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 28th April 2011.

About an hour later, the ceremony for the inauguration of the square officially commenced. In the end, Moratti did not attend, and Mariolina Moioli, committee chairman\(^{30}\) for Social Policies from the Municipality of Milan (assessore alle Politiche Sociali), gave a speech in her stead. After his presentation, the regional officer of housing and social issues addressed the audience, and a third speech came from the regional president of ACLI, a Catholic NGO that supported the creation of new services for the community in two previously abandoned shops in the square. Throughout all these interventions, the protesters from the towers staunchly held their banners in front of them (Figure 10.14, 10.15, 10.16). The Municipality chairman mentioned that she regretted the

\(^{30}\) The assessore is an appointed position within the city council that can be held either by a city councillor or by an external figure proposed by the Mayor.
nature of their situation and would attempt to help them. After the inaugural speeches and before the journalists departed, the chairman was taken for a tour by the local PD chair, to show her what lay behind the front square that had been painted (Figure 10.21). Taking the delegation just beyond the peripheries of the main square, at the entrance of the internal gardens, they were shown the uncollected rubbish that had remained outside and around the bins for weeks. Complaints about the smell and the unsanitary nature of this situation were made by the local PD delegates and consolidated by tenants who had come down to speak with the councillor. The PD councillors who had organised the visit to the buildings later published a video of the opening ceremony, and included footage of the tenants’ protests and the visit to the internal gardens. In doing so, they emphasised the responsibility of the Mayor of Milan and her administration to the state of their housing. The lack of local trust between the institutions and Piazza Capuana households related back to the complaints raised by the tenants of the Lessona Towers. In both cases, residents accused politicians and administrators of failing to effectively regenerate the area, and this was collectively perceived as a failure of politics itself, for the tenants did not believe that any new set of administrators could actually bring about change. Similarly to what I previously discussed in reference to the pre-electoral meeting, as well as in my visit with Viola to the towers, the trajectories we trace from this place support a different political composition than what the Quarto Oggiaro tenants imagined. Politicians, candidates and protesters are therefore united in their aim to produce and control unexpected political outcomes. The controversy of the Via Lessona towers, in conjunction with the critiques of the regeneration strategies of the municipality, had been deflected by the local political establishment through a series of techniques of negotiation, engagement and dis-engagement. By redirecting attention towards other issues, this inaugural event was thus differently composed by the politicians, NGOs, and by protesters. As different groups and inhabitants contributed, the political event became a stage for the unfolding of their contestations. Local politics and elections merged with more contentious activities of the tenants of the Via Lessona Towers, as well as those from Piazza Capuana. The presence of the media in the square during the morning highlighted the relevance of the neighbourhood and the square at different levels. Within these shifts in scale the activities of the protesters are understood as constituting the
composition of place, and contributing more broadly to the creation of social modes aimed at engaging with the transformation of ‘place’ in the neighbourhood and beyond.

Observing the group of contesting tenants in the course of a staged protest, local politics and the composition of places within the neighbourhood became more strictly connected and performed in a more overtly political way. The forms of protest organised by the group of tenants I followed in the second part of this chapter thus need to be considered in relation to the pre-existing and ongoing forms of engagement promoted by the Municipality of Milan in Quarto Oggiaro, in the months prior to the elections. Considering the protest as an “event of place”31 (Massey, 2005, p. 141), the temporalities and different trajectories that emerged from it are more easily reviewed. The place-making practices performed by this group of tenants and politicians traced multiple relationships interlinked in the protest, and can be considered in term of emplaced practices. This framework helps us challenge the analytical limits of viewing such neighbourhood contestations and controversies as merely local and bounded forms of understandings of place (Massey, 2005, Della Porta and Diani, 2004). This critique is often raised in response to protests based on local issues, which are thus perceived to be of minor impact, even parochial and potentially dangerous in their limited vision of place (Massey, 2005 p. 6). Avoiding such assumptions, I traced the trajectory through which the tenants from the Towers in Quarto Oggiaro developed their counter claims, and instead show how these acts expanded the capacity of place beyond its local meaning.

By adopting an understanding of anthropology as an apprenticeship, which could be described as a “practice of observation grounded in participatory dialogue” (Ingold, 2011 p.241), I have undergone this experience as an activist-in-the-making, as well as a researcher in the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro. In this context, I propose that the composition of place is a dynamic process and one that needs to be defined in sometimes unexpected terms. Learning to engage and maintain relationships with multiple actors in the field was a difficult, and at times controversial, endeavour. In the cases presented above, different perspectives contained within the same place collide. Incompatible

---

31 Massey, 2005, p. 141 defines an “event of place” as “the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing” as “open”, “internally multiple”, “not capturable as a slice through time” and “not intrinsically coherent”.

211
proposals touting different understandings of the present are thus adopted to anticipate a desired future and modify the space of political possibilities. Throughout all these experiences, I often had to make my own position - as well as my reasoning and knowledge regarding these delicate issues - public. This particular mode of being in the field factors in the acceleration of objections, or becoming a source of disagreement and disengagement, as a result of alternative positioning and political distances. Such dynamics are not merely relevant methodological developments of one’s approach to fieldwork, but also contribute to particular ways of constructing meaning in politics and the existence of the non-political within place. The expansion of politics into the everyday realm therefore brings mainstream politics into private spaces, right to the intimate level of human dwelling.

In exploring the relationship between electoral politics and everyday life, the multiple capabilities of place that can be addressed transcend any opposition between local and trans-local articulation of politics. Examining the boundaries and limits that constitute more than just local ways of knowing, Candea (2011) considered the meaning of the non-political within a Corsican community. Similarly in my own ethnographic discussion, I have addressed how the non-political in the neighbourhood becomes a space for discussing politics, and that balancing one’s engagement with different controversies alters the meaning of politics and its relationship with what is left as a non-political space (Spencer, 1997; Candea, 2011). While that might sound like a bold claim, this approach leaves more space for the “empirical unpredictability” (Spencer, 1997 p. 9) of the political and can be adopted to more firmly situate the role of politics within the everyday space.

Summary

In this chapter, I examined the often parallel trajectories of electoral politics and neighbourhood disputes. By noting how these two scales encounter or distance each other, I acknowledged the relevance of place for discussing those different categories and scales. In my discussion of several ethnographic accounts, I traced the connections
bringing together the everyday lives of activists and residents in the neighbourhood, through events of protest and contestation. Drawing from the practices of contestation emerging from a social housing complex in a peripheral neighbourhood in Milan, I have observed the composition of place in the *periferia* as the result of a series of shifts, evocations, performative claims, and contestations. By positioning myself within the set of places where those experiences took place, I navigated the limits and the possibilities offered by practices of collaboration, engagement and social composition. While my engagement was not necessarily from an insider perspective on the contestation, the process I was involved in provided me with a view of the controversy as producing a new political context. In the methodological section of this thesis, I broadly introduced the ideas of engaged anthropology as a collaborative endeavour. I also questioned different ways that we can build and maintain these kinds of relationships in the field.
Chapter 11: Different ways of knowing the plan: the personal place of activism and politics

In this chapter, I focus on how planning engages with everyday practices and forms of contestation. In doing so, I explore how technical knowledge about planning is employed to reshape the imagination of the past, present and future of place in the *periferia*. I argue that practices of imagination expand the possibilities of politics and the capacities of activism at different scales. In the case of the *Gronda Nord* controversy, the plan was constantly renegotiated by the institutions, resulting in the proliferation of separate claims and counterclaims. Within these multiple sites of controversy, it is possible to isolate different perspectives that emerged as a result of geographic separation and disagreement on what to do in terms of contestation. Those sites and the way they are relationally inhabited is adopted to discuss how we approach places of contestations methodologically and theoretically. Relations of connections between different sites informed the different doings and undoings of the committees, their organisations, structures and strategies. Divisions in this sense are often an embarrassing element for members of the committees to admit to, but they still maintain a central role in understanding how their work is structured.

**Different sides of the neighbourhood**

In Chapter 8 of this thesis, I discussed the narrative frames as well as the production of plans and policies that form the context for the constitution of the *Gronda Nord* project between the 1990s and the 2000s. Here, focusing on the experience of my fieldwork in 2009-2010 and balancing my engagement with activists and residents in Quarto Oggiaro, I compose a picture of the ways the project had been contested within the neighbourhood, and how this resonated with particular ways of dwelling place. In the course of my fieldwork, I could sense and acknowledge a series of opposing attitudes and proposals for contesting the plan for the *Gronda*. Within Quarto Oggiaro, I can reduce these
differences mainly to a few subgroups, stemming from those associated with a resolutely opposed position to the proposed road and those mainly asking for improvements. It would be a mistake, however, to consider such divisions as anything but a temporal, momentaneous, and necessarily contingent element. Indeed, they were moved by differently bounded categories of interests, as well as political and technical understanding of what bore the impact of the *Gronda* in relation to different positions along the site. Residents, based in different areas of the neighbourhood, brought alternative visions of what they would have been happy to accept instead of the present state of the plan. It is through those discussions that the new configurations of place for Quarto Oggiaro occurs. By recognizing those differences, the engineers and the politicians involved in the controversy altered and managed the transformations of the area. Splitting committees, or simply reaching agreement with single groups detached from the co-ordination, the municipality obtained support for their project avoided more radical forms of opposition. It is through this entanglement that politics and planning in Milan functioned reciprocally as a tool for each other. Provided with electoral support and offering opportunities of engagement with local politics, construction site controversies are more than just technical and infrastructural negotiation. Happening at the level of neighbourhood, city and regional, debate, those controversies produce new fields where politics expands. It is there also that new generations of residents become activists and support one particular vision of place over another. The ability to shift the scale along which controversies are played is central for engaging successfully in this field.

One dissonant position is associated with the creation of a committee by the new residents of *Euromilano* estate. As discussed in Chapter 8, in the period 2000-2008 the project for the *Gronda* was accelerated and associated with a broader regeneration of the south side of the neighbourhood. The project called *Certosa Euromilano (CE)* was indeed part of the strategic plan of the redevelopment of the ex *Fina* area, a contaminated site where previously a chemical plant was based. The project was approved at the end of the 1990s and its construction included the realisation of a new residential area, a large park, and a large supermarket to the south of the neighbourhood. It also included the building of a road on the trajectory of the *Gronda*, but this time under the name of *Strada Interquartiere Nord* (SIN). The construction for the whole project commenced in early
2000. While the shopping centre and residential area were completed in adherence with the initial time plan, the park and road encountered several delays and took longer to complete. In 2004, when I first visited the area, the site where the SIN was to be constructed was already fenced. The construction site now divided the two residential areas of the neighbourhood: Quarto Oggiaro in the north and Certosa in the south. This new definition of the neighbourhood was itself contested, as Certosa sought to redefine itself as part of another neighbourhood.

In this new context designated by the regeneration of the south side of the neighbourhood, the pre-existing quartiere of Quarto Oggiaro and its association with ideas of Milanese periferia was thus mediated by the construction site. The discussion and imagination of different spatial functions within the neighbourhood were also negotiated by the intervention planned within the context of the Gronda/SIN construction site. For example, the planned bridge and park positioned next to the Concilio Vaticano Sub-area are central to the planning controversy, and intentions of the No Gronda activists based in Quarto Oggiaro. At the same time the role of the CE residents are an example of the negotiations between different understandings and imaginations of place happening along the site. Their presence as residents in the neighbourhood is connected with a different temporality of place which constitutes another form of dwelling. What recurrently emerged from interviews with some residents in this area was how their understanding of the controversy was rooted in alternative forms of engagement and attachments. The constitution of these residents as active members in the broader socialities of Quarto Oggiaro stems from their part in the negotiations and discussion of the Gronda Nord controversy, as a separate body with their own interests and needs. That a perceived difference between themselves and the inhabitants of the northern side of the neighbourhood existed was also stated in their desire to be socially considered an autonomous neighbourhood, separated from Quarto Oggiaro. These claims were often contested by several members of the No Gronda Committee, and from active members of the grassroots networks in Quarto Oggiaro, who tried to encourage the act of working

---

32 For a more detailed description of the development of works in the area in this period, see Chapter 8.
together as part of a united network with concurrently emerging grassroots groups based in CE.

CE’s smaller population size, amounting to only about 2000 inhabitants, is probably better defined as sub-areas of Quarto Oggiaro rather than as a separate neighbourhood. The difference between Quarto Oggiaro and CE, however, needs to be recognised as part of a broader distinction between private and public housing. Local residential committees articulated differing positions reflecting area prerogatives in regards to the Gronda Nord construction site. While the committees of citizens belonging more broadly to the Quarto Oggiaro area united in a common position, the new citizens in the EC area even if invited to join, did not take any position at first. In the course of the controversy, they used their autonomy from the Quarto Oggiaro committee to obtain the maximum of benefit by having a direct negotiation with the municipality, while the No Gronda Committees opted instead for a longer legal claim. The committees of Quarto Oggiaro united with other committees along the projected path of the Gronda to elaborate upon a radically alternative project in collaboration with architects and urban planners. This showed what they would have preferred, instead of the proposed double track road crossing alongside their houses. The No Gronda alternative plan included both a tramline and a cycle path along with a smaller road for car traffic. The CE committee instead focused their requests on the necessity to open their access to the main road through a roundabout connecting their houses to the planned strada interquartiere, which the No Gronda Committee contested for being the Gronda under a different name. The articulation of extensions and scale for these projects emerged as a highly contested ground for the different positions articulated within the Gronda controversy. It was within these controversial claims and imagined futures that the Gronda Nord performed and constituted new trajectories, and ultimately new configurations of place. A ‘YES Gronda’ committee was never formed and it was only in recent years that the group of citizens now living in Euromilano managed to organise a different point of view from the one of the main committee. The existence of myriad perspectives on the future of the Gronda was a troubled element in the whole contestation and a threat to the No Gronda committee.
There are different attitudes toward the contestation of the *Gronda* also within the Quarto Oggiaro committee itself. One was based on the side of the *Concilio Vaticano II* estates, while another position regarded the impacts on *Via Aldini*. The difference between these two areas of the broad Quarto Oggiaro neighbourhood are both historical and of different typologies of residencies, as well as of different social classes and generations of residents. The personal engagement of various activists and committee members was a relevant element in the shaping of the controversy. This personal and social composition created new boundaries and divisions in Quarto Oggiaro. In order to understand how activists discussed and configured their contestation over this part of the project, I spoke with residents from *Via Aldini*. It is the oldest area of the neighbourhood and consists mainly of houses built before WWII (see Chapter 6). The houses there reflected a different style, more in line with the previous rural and agricultural functions of this area (similarly to the style of the Porretta farmhouses presented in Chapter 9). In order to discuss the contestation of the road from this side of the neighbourhood, I was referred to Paolo, a prominent resident who was named as a reliable and informed member of the committee. He lived in a flat within a restyled farmhouse court and worked as an agriculturist for the planning office of the Province of Milan. It was particularly his engagement with the project that enabled a discussion on how technical knowledge of planning and legal procedures contributed to the contestation. He was highly involved during the period from 1999 to 2009, and was part of a partially-successful committee request to obtain a series of modifications to the planned road. His key role as spokesperson and coordinator was mentioned to me by almost all of the members that I had previously had the opportunity to interview, both in Quarto Oggiaro and beyond. He guided the opposition movement against the *Gronda* toward the legal and planning controversy that used the sentences of the European Court of Justice and the Italian State Court as a central step. When I interviewed him during the course of my fieldwork in December 2010, however, he no longer considered himself to be directly involved in the contestation. He wanted instead to wait and see what the municipality would do next. Central to understanding his position is the discussion of the meaning and the ways that the sentences of the European and Italian state courts were mobilised in the anti-*Gronda* committees. After that, he decided to stop his role of coordinator and simply accept that, if they would build the road, he had
done everything in his power to stop it. Paolo’s position resonates with Della Porta and Diani’s (2004) argument about the capacity for local urban movements to scale up their protest. This process happens when, as in the case of the Gronda Nord, their counterpart contests their argument as a defence of localism. In the cases detailed by Della Porta and Diani (2004, p.121), the involvement of environmental associations and experts is presented as a central element for the ability to scale up the protest and deal with the macro-level of transport and road mobility at an urban and regional level. In the case of the Gronda Nord protest, the capacity to scale up the protest instead appeared connected with the technical knowledge that, like Paolo, members of the committees adopted to develop a strategy of contestation. In this way, the shifting relationship discussed in Chapter 8, between planning and politics since the 1990s, can also be extended to the practices of contesting committees. In the neighbourhood, the logic of “intellectually legitimated expertise” (Healey 2008, p.867) and “management without politics” (Martinotti, 2005, p. 44, cited in Gonzalez, 2009, p.42) is indirectly transposed upon the relationships and organization of committees against the Gronda Nord. This logic echoes Muehlebach’s (2009) argument that the Italian neoliberal project is better understood as containing its own opposition as part of a single moral order (p.495).

In the case of the Gronda Nord and its development, during the four consecutive right-wing administrations following the tangentopoli scandals, it is possible to see how the hegemonic project of stabilization that was viewed as a driving force in the current Milanese new construction renaissance also involved those who contested its production. We can thus agree with the Muehlebach argument (2009) that it is critiques and not consent that animates citizens to take part in hegemonic projects (p.497). The involvement of the Gronda Nord committee throughout this long period of negotiations with the different actors in the controversy was key for creating effectiveness and meaningfulness within their protest. These negotiations are also helpful for understanding how a construction site is differently inhabited and imagined, both spatially and temporally. What may at first seem a straight connection designed on maps can be otherwise imagined in both the expert and non-expert languages of committee activists, residents, or architects and planners engaged with the controversy. Different elements constitute the ways in which the working and projected intentions of the construction site...
are learned by the community, then discussed or ultimately contested through formulated methods of action. In chapter 10, I explored how public meetings and debates provide a central arena where expert knowledge, both from the planning and political agenda, are capable of unfolding the contestation. Here, I further develop these arguments by showing how personal feelings and emotive interpretations hold a significant weight in making those contentions. The capacity of the controversy to generate new and unexpected outcomes is associated with its ability to imagine different scales for the contestation. Such scales act as a framework of engagement, producing multiple and unpredictable outcomes. This is what Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen (2009) identify as “technologies of imagination”, those that are defined by their capacity to conceptualise imagination in relation to the incidental and unexpected modes through which specific conditions emerge (p.26). In this section, in accordance with this approach, I connect practices of imagination produced along the construction site together with the technologies that are put into place to produce “unconditioned outcomes”, (Sneath, Holbraad, Pedersen, 2009, p. 19). Those processes can be broadly understood as ways of developing, unfolding and extracting new conditions and possibilities out of a controversy.

In explaining his position to me, Paolo provided a highly rational and pacifistic understanding of how mobility planning is dealt with in the region of Milan. His attempt with the committees along the Gronda Nord was to propose a series of alternatives and a broader planning vision for mobility. He told me that he was a moderate Catholic and therefore unwilling to bring the struggle against the Gronda forward in ways not fully pacifistic and legal. At a certain point, however, he realised that the only remaining ground for the protest would have resulted in an escalation of conflict with the municipality and the firms implementing the project. It was because of this that he supported articulating the protest through the legal, political, and institutional systems available. As a consequence of this approach, when he and the rest of the committee members, obtained a series of partial yet positive results from their contestation, he was happy to accept them. The main result he mentioned was the interramento of the road, or the substitution of the road with a tunnel to connect the Gronda with the Expo site Eritrea Street. This, for him and the rest of the members of the committee living in Aldini, avoided a direct impact of the Gronda on this area of the neighbourhood, by limiting the noise and having little
visual impact on the site. For him, this outcome, after years of sustained struggle, was a positive and desirable result. Even if his understanding of the planning and political systems that generated the Gronda remained negative, he also accepted that the system was not easy to change, though he recognised that it could be improved. This result also created the opportunity for him to step back from his all-consuming, integral role within the committee as a spokesperson. After taking a break from his involvement for more than a year, he confessed that my interview with him was quite an emotional encounter, for it brought back a lot of memories of the past. Now that he held an external position to the current stage of the controversy, he told me he felt able to objectively observe proceedings from a comfortable distance, whilst still maintaining a critical understanding of the way the Gronda was planned and managed at its architectural, political, and infrastructural levels. Other members of the committee from the area also confirmed this understanding of the negotiation with the municipality. In this sense, the respect for Paolo’s position was maintained by other members despite his resignation from the role of committee spokesperson. This exemplifies how committees such as the one against the Gronda Nord are not despised by politicians but instead invited to cooperate in order to reach an agreement, so that the planning regime act as a tool for building consensus.

Paolo’s position was certainly in contrast to the feelings with which Francesca and the Concilio Vaticano II committee maintained their fight against the Gronda. There the committee remained belligerent and started a new contestation based on the defence of the Parco Simoni, another area nestled between the housing estate and the construction site. Parco Simoni was a park created in the mid 1990s, in what was previously the Cava Cabassi, a quarry for the excavation of construction soils owned by the Cabassi family, one of the biggest land owners in Milan. Redevelopment of the park began in August 2009. In the course of just a few weeks, the park had been completely fenced in and the only justification offered for this was the municipal claim that there had been environmental contamination of the underground waters. The trees on one side of the park were quickly uprooted and the soil removed. This area consisted of the site where the bridge for the construction of the Gronda Nord was planned to pass, which would connect this segment of the road with the east side of the Milanese periferia. Soon after the closing of the park and demolition of the trees, the works on this site excavated the contaminated soil and
replaced it with a black plastic sheet that was positioned two metres below ground level, then covered with new soil. For Francesca, this whole series of interventions was not coincidental. To her, the redevelopment of Parco Simoni and the construction of the Gronda were part of the same agenda from the municipality. This view was shared by other members of the committee, who decided to raise the funding for an independent examination of the soils. In the meantime, they requested access to the original documentation authorising the cutting of the trees. Meanwhile, the workers began to install the pillars for the bridge.

The destruction of the Simoni Park was a particularly personal element for Francesca, and her own role in the organization of the Concilio Vaticano committee was central in its capacity to counteract the municipality. This event brought the Gronda contestations in direct proximity to her home and she considered this an act of violence that she struggled to process. Additionally, she was extremely saddened by how the contestation against the Gronda was losing support, compared to the strength of unity that the campaign displayed a few years previously. This was partly due to the difficulty of reversing the damages already wreaked upon the neighbourhood, and in part down to concessions on the other side of the neighbourhood dividing the united network of committees. Francesca realised that this particular situation of controversy was something she could not ignore. With this partially personal, yet engaged perspective that she introduced me to this situation. When I first moved into Quarto Oggiaro, she visited me to confess that she was still in a state of shock about how the municipal had destroyed the trees and the park. She said, “They waited for the 15th of August, when everyone is on holiday for doing this dirty job” (my translation). When she realised they had removed the trees and fenced the park, it was too late. In this framework, Francesca could not stop contrasting the Gronda and this park. She managed to gain the backing of other local activists and some environmental organisations, and with their support she succeeded in saving half of the park, which was reopened to the public. This partial win of her campaign demonstrated, in her view, that claims of contamination to the underground soils were falsified. When, after several requests to the municipality, she managed to obtain the analysis produced on the soils, they stated that the contamination occurred at about 20 metres underground, yet the plastic cap positioned by the workers only penetrated about 2 metres into the
ground. Francesca was not surprised to learn about this contradictory environmental evidence. Even if no further legal investigation regarding the causes of the contamination was taken, she suspected that there were episodes of illegal dumping in the area by criminal organisations\(^3\). For her, the intervention of the destruction of the park in an area to be crossed by the *Gronda*, and its fast transformation into a working construction site, was a criminal act. Proof of this, for her, was that the remaining part of the park had been reopened to the public, while the area required to ensure the safe passage of the *Gronda* was immediately secured through the layering of a plastic cap, then prepared for the building of the bridge. In the Spring of 2011, half the park that was occupied by the development was reopened with new concrete paving, where a children’s playground and an open-air basketball field were positioned.

The capacity to imagine a different outcome as a result of acceleration in the contestation is central to understanding how the level of commitment for such practices is afforded. The construction site in this sense is not just as a metaphor for imagining and understanding politics, but also a technology through which politics and planning are continually articulated. The ways that this road was perceived by members of the committee are to be considered a necessarily partial and fragmentary configuration. Different understandings of the nature, scale, and future possibilities provided by the road were strictly connected with these visions. Francesca created a new committee for the defence of the *Simoni Park*. This committee claimed that, from the beginning, the intentions of the municipality were to implement the *Gronda Nord* construction site. As the partial destruction of the park had occurred after the European court suspended the works of the road until an environmental evaluation was completed, Francesca claimed that those works had taken place illegally and should not be allowed to continue. The committee also criticised the planners’ design of the playground that was built on the site, comprising of a childrens’ play area enclosed by a circle of stone benches (see Figure 11.2). Stout, broad stones were used as decoration for the park, but from Francesca’s point of view, as both a mother and a regular user of the park, this decision resulted in a

---

\(^3\) The construction sector in Italy, and in particular soil movement and excavation, was denounced publicly by journalists and courts as one of the main areas of infiltration by criminal organisations. The main criminal organisations, Ndrangeta and Camorra, had since the 1980s established a real control in Quarto Oggiaro.
dangerous, redundant design. Following the examination of soil samples taken from the fenced area and the new park, with the expenses charged to the committee, Francesca and the group discovered trace elements of asbestos bricks mixed with the ground adopted to recover the soil of the park (see Figures 11.3, 11.4). After this discovery, she contacted several journalists, inviting them for an impromptu press conference in the park itself. Upon their arrival, she guided them through the park, presenting the position of the committee in response to the current circumstances. At the moment of my departure from Milan, this issue was still uncertain and no further action by the magistrate had been undertaken. In the meantime, a larger scandal engulfed nearby areas of the Expo site, where several inquiries exposed similar instances of soil contamination doubtlessly perpetrated by the infiltration of organised crime in the construction trade.

Figure 11.1: Members of the Simoni Park Committee during a day of protest with a banner saying “The works in Simoni Park will not start, we will resist, resist, resist”. Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 5th June 2011.
Figure 11.2: A committee member collecting residents’ signatures for a petition to save Simoni Park (in the background the new playground). Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 5th June 2011.

Figure 11.3: A view of the fenced part of the park, already excavated for making space to the Gronda Nord construction site (where some traces of asbestos had been found). Photo by Alessandro Froldi, 5th June 2011.
What was it exactly that motivated Francesca’s despair, and to what extent was this despair connected to the *Gronda Nord* issue or her broader understanding of the politics of planning in Milan, within the wider realm of Italian politics and state? Francesca, by introducing me to the “mess” of the controversy in that she engaged with over the previous 5 years, presented me with an activity that was part of her life in the most direct sense. By choosing to contest the institution on the grounds of their wrong-doings, and appealing to planning and legal procedures to stop the works which were being constructed directly in front of her flat, Francesca invested an extensive part of her time to contestation, devoted in her desire to achieve the best available quality of life for her family. By taking an active stance as part of the urban transformations operating in the context of both the neighbourhood and the city where she lived, Francesca conducted an investment in her own capacity to change and engage with the world she inhabited, a “meshwork” (Ingold, 2011, p.63) that developed from the intersection of planning, politics, and activism. That is, as an understanding of how different activities and practices contribute to changing the perception and imagination of place. In this case, the committee’s work of contesting, as produced by several citizens, activists, and inhabitants, created a fresh insight into the
ways politics was enacted within their neighbourhood. Francesca purchased the house where she and her family lived when the local council offered social housing tenants the opportunity to buy their homes; her attachment to the place was thus one that could be traced back to her childhood and the territoriality of her family. She was employed as a janitor in a public primary school a few metres away and because of this, it is easy to deduce the totality of her immersion in the life of the neighbourhood, so conclude that it was of great importance to her. At the same time, her engagement with the broader issues of planning contestations, environmental claims, and citizen participation became an integral part of her life and she was proud to present her active role in several grassroots organisations in the area.

In stark contrast with Paolo, Francesca was not an expert of legal and environmental procedures and could only rely on the judgments of other members or by seeking external advice. Still, she admitted to me she maintained a hope in the possibility of obtaining some improvement in the way the project was developing. She told me her protest against the municipality was driven by desperation - “vado avanti per disperazione” - and everyone in the committee was feeling the same way, for there was little they could do but wait and see what would happen next. Her opinion on how the municipality dealt with the planning and construction was extremely critical. She believed, however, that some space for negotiation in the controversy was present and further opportunities could be obtained through the activities of the committee. For Francesca, as well as for most of the members of the committee I was able to contact, the struggle was unfinished and collective opinion maintained that they could still somehow influence the building of the road. Their contestation would continue on the legal grounds they had opened in 2004. Their aim was to ensure that the road the municipality had authorised to build could not be completed as initially intended. The sentence of the European court and later the Italian state court, confirmed the necessity of submitting an environmental impact evaluation. For the committee, this sentence confirmed that the intention of the municipality was to build a large high speed road for cars, not merely serving neighbourhood streets as the municipality had previously implied. Francesca’s despair for the Gronda contestation, paired with her continuing support for the cause, presented me with a dilemma on how to interpret statements, feelings, and hopes in the context of
planning contestations. Here Ingold’s “the logic of inversion” (1993, 2006) is better understood in the terms described by Muehlebach (2009) as, “complexion oppositorum (complex of opposites)”. Within this kind of relationship, the neoliberal project shaping Italian politics contains “forms of reason and social relations that appear contrary to it” and retain “the tensions of oppositionality (p. 498).

Contesting the Gronda: within and beyond expert knowing

A detailed look at the practices of contestation put in place by the committees against the Gronda Nord should not necessarily be based on an assumption of ontological differences between the logic of the contestants and the supporters of the project. At the same time, an understanding of the dynamics and the shifting categories adopted by the committee to frame their work provides a map of the inner tensions that Milanese urban regimes had to integrate into their framework. Earlier in my fieldwork, when I decided to concentrate on the controversy of the Gronda Nord, it was suggested I contact Gianni, a resident of the Concilio Vaticano estate, who was involved in the contestation. He was an architect and planner who had moved into Quarto Oggiaro a few years ago with his wife, when they bought a flat from a previous resident. It was he who had mostly run the activities of the Quarto Oggiaro committee in recent months and thus would be able to offer me an insight into what the future strategies of the committee would most likely be. In the previous two years, he was responsible for the development of planning documentations for the court cases the committee was involved with, and he was now preparing further documentation in support of the committee’s latest claims. His skills as a planner made his participation in the Gronda Nord contestation particularly concerned with regulations and environmental laws, utilising the technical jargon of urban design and architecture. From his point of view, the road did not conform to existing planning norms, ruling over the distance of large road infrastructure from residential buildings, and because of this the work should have been blocked after the ruling decision of the European court to halt the construction. A specific sort of intellectual labour was intended by my counterpart as valid for the definition of the controversy. Technical knowledge,
imagined as a neutral and bi-partisan form of engagement with place, was constantly, not without difficulties, shaped by members of the committee like Gianni who firmly believed that the issue did not require any forms of political commitment in order to be understood and resolved. For Gianni, my socio-anthropological interest in his work and the activities of the *Gronda* was difficult to understand. He told me that if I had been an architect, planner, or engineer, my research on the *Gronda Nord* would have contributed to his own work and the strategies the committee were trying to put together.

The strategy of the committee, as defined in Paolo’s understanding of the controversy, was based on technical evidence such as court verdicts, the documentation of environmental impacts, and, in particular, the submission of several technical *osservazioni*, or remarks that citizens could submit before the final approval of the PGT (*General City Plan*). These *osservazioni* were coordinated by the committees so that they could provide a large number of critiques based on solid technical evidence and appendices. Ultimately, Paolo was convinced that the committee should try and support everything that could legally be done to stop the present project and its completion. He imparted to me that many of his initial expectations proved to be somewhat naive in light of recent developments in the controversy. Nonetheless, he declared himself resolutely confident that their commitment was not wasted and that the construction of the road could still be blocked. At the same time, his belief in placing limits upon the committee’s contestation contrasted with his idea of somehow obtaining an unexpected outcome. He stated that the amount of time he was putting into the struggle against the *Gronda* was already a source of distress for him, but this was related more to his disillusionment with politics rather than with planning. Similarly to other committee members, for him the outcome of the contestation was only partially conducive to the validity of their claims. Instead the context of emerging from Milanese politics provided a different way of explaining how planning controversies can be dealt with. Controversies of this kind are a form of anxiety against politics and the state that, in the context of 1990s Northern Italy, emerged in terms of both political “integralism”, populism and “neo-localism” (*Holmes, 2001, Stacul 2003, 2006*). In addition, the awareness and allegations of corruption that were regularly documented by local press promoted an understanding of planning dynamics as overlapping in a grey zone, where politics could ultimately be associated
with bribes. Gianni and Francesca’s kindness in showing their engagement with the Gronda controversy to me offered an opportunity to build a collaboration through mutual engagement.

Summary

Focused on experiences, and the forms of knowing and contestation produced by citizens engaged in planning controversies, in this chapter, I discuss how different understandings of place, locality and boundaries emerge from a construction site in Quarto Oggiaro. Attending to these multiple and divergent constitutions of place, I unfold the contested construction site as sociality inhabited, involving different logics of dwelling and for thinking of a road, a neighbourhood and a city. Focusing on different sections of the Gronda Nord road, I address the meaning of contestation and how activists engage with the project. The controversy is thus presented as one connected with ways of inhabiting, socialising and identifying as a neighbourhood resident. It is in this entanglement that I argue negotiation between planning and politics is central for the composition of anthropological places. I propose we look at how committee members reflect on their own contribution and the ways in which they specifically pursue their aims. Understanding these practices as part of the process of making places, my discussion shows also how urban imagination, discourse, and processes of contestation change the ways in which politics are configured within the neighbourhood.

The study of committee activism presented in this chapter offers an opportunity to address the relations between local politics and civil society, in the context of a Milanese neighbourhood. Providing an understanding of the perceptions of politics and activism as they emerge from the practices of the local committee, I discuss how tensions and contradictions in the Milanese and Italian political sphere are incorporated and dealt with in a planning controversy. In Quarto Oggiaro, (similarly to the case discussed by Della Porta and Diani, 2004) there are strong interests at stake in obtaining the result of blocking the construction of a road, and diverse alliances and forms of networking are put into place with different political parties, environmental associations and experts. In this case, a number of activists participate in the multi-sited and multi-sided activities of different
local committees (comitati) united in a coordinamento (co-ordination). Seriously considering the activities and the relations in which these members of committees were engaged during my fieldwork, I trace the ways this local committee connects and entangles with broader political spaces, and how these relationships are built, and maintained.
Conclusion:

This thesis uses theories of place in order to understand the phenomena of urban planning controversies as socio-historical experiences and processes. During the course of this thesis, I articulated this understanding with specific attention to the theoretical, methodological, historical and ethnographic contributions that such an approach entails, and structured this work accordingly. In adopting anthropological theories of place, this thesis aimed to expand, across all of its chapters, the possibilities of what we can learn from exploring both present and historical practices of planning and social movements which emerged from Italian cities. The experiences of activists and residents in the urban periferia of Quarto Oggiaro in Milan, along with my own research into, and engagement with, some of their contestations, were presented in this thesis, so as to revisit and more broadly discuss how planning and politics are articulated.

Between planning and politics: anthropological places revisited

The starting point for my theoretical argument in Chapter 1 lies in the need to promote a more structural inclusion and consideration of the role of politics for addressing the limits of phenomenological and relational understandings of place. Proposing to expand our use of the category ‘anthropological place’ (Augé, 2000), I then suggested using Ingold’s discussion of the concepts of dwelling and inhabitation (1993, 2005) to trace how political phenomena contribute to the constitution of places. My ethnography follows several cases of contestation in Quarto Oggiaro where residents demonstrated their capacity of reinventing the meaning of politics through planning contestations. Intersecting both the field of anthropology of planning and the field of anthropology of social movements in the second chapter, I discussed anthropological places as capable of containing linkages between multiple scales and connecting localities to global phenomena.

The work of a local committee is engaged with, in the course of the thesis, through different accounts discussing how forms of contestations are produced, organised and
eventually brought to a halt. Far from desiring to provide judgment over the validity of the committee strategies, my work focused on tracing and intersecting the different levels (legal, political and technical) through which the controversy unfolded. This approach provided a broader conceptualisation of Quarto Oggiaro, including contrasting visions and tensions that have been part of the neighbourhood since its initial construction across the period encompassing both World Wars. Chapters 7 and 10 stand out from the narrative of the road infrastructure narrative. They provided two different examples of how the narrative of contestation inhabiting the neighbourhood has been developed. My analysis of those cases spans a number of decades, engaging with both political and planning instances, as well as with the administrative transformations undergone within the Italian state and the city of Milan (discussed in more historical detail in Chapters 6 and 8). This shows the necessity to employ theories of place capable of including the multiple scales, where politics and planning are established and contested. It is by exploring those possibilities that an anthropological approach to planning controversies can contribute to questions of place and how these are translated within specific localities, either in the city or in its periphery. The Milanese periferia offers, what I have defined as, an anthropological place – both as a theoretical enterprise and as a nexus of practices and experiences – that is simultaneously relevant and inspiring for the development of an anthropology of the Italian state, and also to the tendencies present within the European and Mediterranean neoliberal turn.

Providing a context to theory: place and engagements beyond ethnography

My experience of living in the periferia in Milan, with activists and residents involved in activities of community organization, was central for defining what could be learnt from this particular place and how this learning could be made relevant to the production of anthropological knowledge. In the same way, as these residents were actively involved in the shaping of political action within their neighbourhood, my work aimed to engage within existing debates over the limitations and challenges of planning practices, and the nature of city governance. Indeed, it was precisely through seriously considering the
claims of my interlocutors in the field, that I could trace the significance of planning controversies in extracting productive gains from politics. In my thesis, I discussed this in relation to the institutional realm of electoral politics and bureaucratic practices. It was by collaborating with activists and residents in the field that my work in the Milanese neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro could contribute to the anthropology of place, while understanding and unfolding ideas and practices of planning controversies.

Understanding place as constituted in ways that are open and relational, my research integrated the practices of activists’ movements as emerging from multiple ethnographic accounts within the practices of everyday life constituting and informing place. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated the usefulness of approaching planning controversies through methodologies of engagement and collaboration; that is, in their capacity to produce objections and unexpected outcomes. I then, in Chapter 4, I connected this discussion to my own arrival and subsequent participation in the field, therein, arguing for the centrality of movements and socialites in the establishment, and maintenance of engagement during fieldwork. My methodological argument called upon the necessity to adopt ethnographic methods in conjunction with historical and archival work. This later element was then further presented across several chapters of this thesis (beginning in chapters 5 and 6) where I explored the entanglement of disciplinary forms of knowledge in the discussion of Italian periferia. In Chapter 5, I looked at the establishment of the discipline of anthropology and planning in Italy as part of a broad new concept of the modern state. I then focused this debate more specifically upon the history of Milanese urban planning and the birth of its periferia (Chapter 6), as an unfinished project from which the perspective of planning controversies offer a reversal. In Chapter 6, I also introduced a central controversy which I further charted through its historical developments in chapters 8, 9 and 11. This controversy, bound up in the establishment of a proposed road infrastructure crossing the neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro and extending across the whole Northern Milanese periferia, provides this thesis with a counter-narrative for reconsidering the history of modern planning in Milan, as well as broader tensions and contestations against local and national politics, governance and the Italian state.
Enhancing anthropological theories and methodologies

The different sections of my thesis all inform, and are informed in different ways by, the experience of fieldwork that I have conducted. They also contribute to broadening the ways in which we can research Italian periferia as well as social movements and planning controversies. While each chapter and section can be considered as an independent and autonomous contribution, it is only by connecting these different sections together the main argument emerges: the proposal of an understanding of planning controversies from the interactions and linkages that they owe to the different contexts in which they occur. These, in particular, are the realm of planning, local politics and activism in Italy as well as in the socio-historical trajectory of the development of the Milanese periferia. The multi-scalar connections and shifts in scale between different levels from the local to the provincial, regional, national and international levels are central to the way I understand the composition of place and the unfolding of planning controversies. In the same way as the controversy of the Gronda Nord crossed different levels of administrative, legal and political contestations, my work (mainly based in Quarto Oggiaro) demonstrates the central multiplicity of place and its ‘more than local’ configuration. In order to define and address the ways these contexts and scales matter and come to influence the expansion of the controversy, I have proposed to adopt the terminology and the conceptual framework of different theories of place. This was in order that ideas of relationality and multiplicity can also address the political significance of planning controversies and the uneven dimension of power emerging from the Milanese periferia. In particular, the idea of anthropological places has provided a tool for addressing, both the complexities unfolded by the controversy, and my own entangled relationships with the different, conceptualised universes of my interlocutors in the field. In Chapter 9, this contrasting vision of place is exemplified by the sense of disorientation I experienced during a guided tour of the neighbourhood. In chapter 11, another informant explained to me her engagement with the controversy as one which was motivated more by despair than by hope. In thinking of my work as part of the re-definition of anthropological places in the field and beyond, I have explored the mutual co-production of knowledge that happens before, during and after fieldwork. The reactions of my interlocutors to my own process
of research, and the collaborative endeavours I attempted to establish during my residence in Quarto Oggiaro, also provided a central element for the redefinition of anthropological places. The rationality of place is, therefore, best understood as processes of constant negotiation and contestation, similar to the experience of multiple objections to an article I helped writing during the course of my fieldwork. In this case, my engagement in that particular dispute, provided an opportunity to understand the shifting role of politics within a planning controversy between different groups of residents, as well as with the institutions that were deemed responsible for delivering, not simply a form of accommodation, but a right of dwelling.

Following a relational approach to the idea of dwelling by complementing the works of Ingold (1993, 2005) and Massey (2005), I questioned what defines the different moments and practices that constitute the meaning of fieldwork. In particular, I have articulated the situations of arrival, routine and accommodation, as three levels through which it was possible to build, maintain and develop a methodology grounded in an understanding of anthropological fieldwork, as part of the experience of moving across places, dwelling and inhabiting. The neighbourhood is first presented in the narrative of my own driving to the field, across highways and infrastructural borders, in the securing of my own home in the field, then as an anthropological place introduced as a necessarily-negotiated environment between different actors, interlocutors and affects. Speaking of how my own research routine had been concerned with accommodating and learning from the everyday life of an urban neighbourhood and its diverse population, I have presented my ethnographic narrative, the result of a mutual engagement between the anthropologist and their interlocutors in the field, and as place for the discussion and development of theory in the field. Walking, visiting and discussing with my informants from the Quarto Oggiaro No Gronda committee, I was presented with personal and intimate forms of intellectual and political experience, often entangled in the planning controversy and difficult to distinguish from its realm. As a way of unfolding and making sense of my interlocutors’ political aspirations, hopes and disillusionments, walks, guided tours and memories of their previous experiences of contestations, provided me with an opportunity to explore and to engage with multiple temporalities and imaginations inscribed upon the past, present and future of Milan.
Reimagining the context of politics as an ethnographic intervention

I have argued that controversies and contestations focus and aim to transform the relation between different knowledge practices that are often deemed separate and distinct. In this sense the construction site is to be viewed as composed of multiple practices and forms of knowledge, assembled through processes of contestations and controversies connected as a material and technological infrastructure of imagination. In the course of the Gronda Nord controversy, I traced how the realms of planning, politics and legal contestations were reclaimed by the different committees involved. In the course of their engagement with the different institutions deemed to answer to their claims, members of the committee developed and applied ways of understanding, particularly of the roles of planning and politics in relation to the administration and governance of their city and their neighbourhood. The legal and planning procedures were, therefore, central for learning how the controversy was being experienced and explained to non-planners like me. Planning narratives can take part in social movements and shape the practices of activists, as well as their everyday life. Accounting and attending to institutional and legal documentation, I have often felt uneasy about how I should have analysed them myself. Accepting the necessary partiality and incompleteness of anthropological knowledge, I have proposed to follow the policy in terms of the narratives and forms of organization of the present. The ways in which different people see and imagine what is happening on the construction site, reveals a negotiated reality in which different localities are mobilized and connected, and the movements between them are ontologically conceptualized, justified and reimagined in different times. Practices of contestations and planning controversies are thus differently positioned within the No Gronda activist and non-activist community, working or passing through the neighbourhood. Different episodes and events from the long period of contestation of this road, are also entangled and mobilised by activists and institutions involved in the construction of the road.
Discussing activist perspectives as part of multiple ontological worlds

Activities of contestation in this thesis have been positioned both on the legal levels and on a more imaginative level where, as an example, the nature of a planned road is interpreted differently by different inhabitants. In the course of this thesis I have shown how legal and imaginative levels are not necessarily opposed, but instead work together, producing virtual models of planning and architectural alternatives to support a series of counterclaims against the municipality. Even in the case of the Quarto Rosso youth movements, their forms of contestations, as well as their re-visitation in the course of my fieldwork, were performed within the everyday life of the neighbourhood, enacting and putting into place another form of inhabiting and dwelling. In order to understand how this articulation of knowledge affects the composition of the neighbourhood, I looked in more detail at what different No Gronda committee members saw as their own contribution and how they specifically pursued their aims. After understanding these practices as processes of making places, urban imaginations and processes of contestation, I realised they constitute a complex body of claims and narratives. A protest can, therefore, be viewed as part of everyday life routines. The protesters articulated a contrasting vision against the institution’s political and planning practices. Meeting, discussing and studying the bureaucratic material produced by different institutions, residents objected to the impositions of their administrators with a series of strategies intending to organize forms of contestations capable of alleviating or ameliorating their condition more than radically opposing ideas of power or authority. At the same time, their distress and sense of hopelessness in some cases, showed me a radical disillusionment with the promises of planning and politics. Even if the different political capacities of the student movement presented within chapter 7 and the rest of the ethnographic narrative emerge as part of almost two different worlds, their common grounding in the experience of the Quarto Oggiaro periferia constitute a legacy as well as a potential challenge to the same logic that have been at the other end of similar complaints, for better housing and better living in the neighbourhood. In the course of different historical and ethnographic narratives I have explored the multiple temporalities and spatialities emerging from these planning controversies as part of an attempt at conditioning the indeterminacy arising from the
domains of planning and politics. The *Gronda Nord* controversy offered a new way of inhabiting place, new temporalities and new capacities for the existing forms of knowledge and power shared by members of local committees engaged with the contestation of planning and political projects. Place is, therefore, resolved through practices of contrastive imagination of the potential futures of the construction site. I have explored the *Gronda Nord* site as a device and a technology for understanding the political and economic agendas of the city of Milan at a micro level. The results of reformulating a conception of the construction site in terms of place as ‘coming into being through multiple engagements’ creates large-scale political and economic implications.
Bibliography:


Canevari, Annapaola, 1986, Il boom degli anni ’60 e gli strumenti del “rito ambrosiano”. In Campos Venuti, Giuseppe, Boatti, Aantonello, Canevari, Annapaola, Erba, Valeria and Oliva, Federico (eds), *Un secolo di Urbanistica a Milano*. Milano, Clup.


Feld, Steven and Basso, Keith (eds), 1996, Senses of Place. Santa Fe, New Mexico, School of American Research Press.


Hannerz, Ulf, 2003, Being there... and there... and there! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography, in *Ethnography*, vol. 4 no. 2 201-216.


Indovina Franco, 1974, *Lo spreco edilizio*. Padova, Marsilio


Yaneva Albena, 2005, Scaling up and down: extraction trials in architectural design. 
*Social Studies of Science* 35/6, pp. 867–894.