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Working with words: Italian feminism and organization studies

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Abstract

Searching for a writing about organizations that is more real, relevant, and respondent, we propose to engage with Italian feminism of difference and the wealth of practices elaborated by small feminist groups and collectives, associated with it in the seventies. Currently undergoing a phase of rising interest, in Europe and North America, this strand of feminism—philosophically varied and complex—is characterized by the act of grounding theory in practice and articulating practices of political and personal transformation deeply anchored in society, yet outside institutions. In this paper, we aim at presenting Italian feminism and more specifically introduce the main tenets of Italian feminism of difference (of the seventies) to organization studies. We focus on a specific practice of Italian feminism of difference, namely the partire da sé (departing from oneself), prepared by the earlier practice of autocoscienza (political consciousness-raising). Resting particularly on the thinking of the philosopher Luisa Muraro, we frame the potential contribution of her theorizing the partire da sè practice in relation to existing organization research that is grounded in feminist stands.

KEYWORDS
Autocoscienza, departing from oneself, different writing, Italian feminism of difference, Luisa Muraro

1 | INTRODUCTION

> Through the practices of consciousness raising, we are led to discover that the true world is that which is given in our experience through the word and in the word through experience. For me, this discovery is equivalent to finding the viewpoint of origins when the world was born together with us and with our knowing how to speak.
>
> Luisa Muraro, *the symbolic order of the mother 2018 (1991)*

Feminisms are overlooked in mainstream management studies. Indeed, this discipline has traditionally been more "tenacious" than others in defending a gender-neutral, difference-erasing position (Gherardi, 2005), either overlooking (Bell et al., 2019) or predominantly employing liberal feminism-oriented views (Benshop & Verloo, 2016), which extend as far as post-feminist discursivities (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017) to de-politicize and normalize feminist critical impulses (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004).[1] This happens, for example, by "decoupling the study of gender—as sex—from feminist principles of inquiry" (Bell et al., 2019), consisting for instance in merely reporting the presence or absence of sex differences in organizational environments, as shown by Ely and Padavic (2007), without engaging critically with feminist theoretical and political views. Pioneering authors Marta Calás and Linda Smircich were noticing this tendency as early as 1989, remarking that the "the F word" was "an invitation for trouble" and was perceived "more like politics than scholarship" (Calás & Smircich, 1989, p. 359).[2] It is not accidental, we believe, that that "dirty word" starting with "F" is "feminist" and not "feminism," thus already inscribing the author's own position and positionality into the text.

Yet, there are many scholars of management and organization who do work from that composite, diverse, and multi-faceted political and philosophical project that is feminism. Several scholars have investigated and theorized the specificities of feminist organizations and organizing (Acker, 1990; Brown, 1992), focused on the narration of the feminist movement's organizational efforts (Hogan, 2016; Martucci, 2008; Springer, 2005). Others have employed feminist perspectives to analyze specific aspects of management such as decision-making (Ferguson, 1984; Iannello, 1993), power allocation (Mishra & Singh, 2007), and the discursive processes of meaning construction (Katzenstein, 1995) and institutionalization (Zilber, 2002). In studying different aspects of management, feminist scholars have rejected the idea of organizations' gender neutrality and encouraged critical inquiry into all organizations as sites for producing and reproducing gender norms (Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 1994; Martin, 2003, 2006; Tyler, 2019), even in efforts to overcome gender discrimination (Czarniawska 2006; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). More recent studies have raised the possibility that certain organizational practices can positively undo (Kelan, 2010; McDonald, 2013) or underdo (Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016) gender through binary-displacing or pluralizing practices. Feminism has also inspired organizational scholarship's epistemological orientations and methodologies (Gherardi & Poggio, 2007, 2009; Reinharz, 1992; Skeggs, 2000) as well as appealing to a different practice of science altogether. Building on different streams of feminist theory, scholars have also increasingly critiqued the normativity of what counts as scientific academic writing and its connection with masculinity (Höpfl, 2000, Phillips et al., 2014): they have considered, for example, the writing style and reviewing practices (Bell et al., 2019; Prasad, 2016) found not only in academic journals but also in the early stages of an academic career, namely the genre of writing that is the gateway to the profession, the PhD thesis (Weatherall, 2019). They have suggested resisting such normalization (Rippin, 2015) and illustrated critically different possibilities of engaging with writing (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008, 2015). Such feminist sensitivity has also been displayed by several scholars who move beyond the explicit theorization of feminist practices to also act as feminist role models. Barbara Czarniawska's work is an excellent example of influential feminist organizational scholarship, with her situated, narrative writing style and use of personal memories and background stories as well as her more recent and explicit advocacy (together with Guye Sevòn) for first-name citation tactics (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2018).

In many of these works, the authors make an explicit or implicit choice to engage with writing as an important site of making science and the world. As early as 1994, Silvia Gherardi wrote in a footnote to an article that her

decision to use the first singular person ("I") in writing was the "last bastion of my resistance against the standardization of language by "normal" science" (Gherardi, 1994, p. 592). This expression echoes a feminist understanding of language as a highly privileged sites for both the creation of women's subjugation and the possibility of liberation (Cavarero, 2002, Irigaray, 1998 [1974]). In management and organization studies, multiple scholars have advocated for writing differently, in a way that not only challenges the canons of the masculine academy (Phillips et al., 2014; Rhodes & Pullen, 2008) but also produces a body of work that remains critical (Gilmore et al., 2019). Many of these works build such arguments by engaging with authors such as Julia Kristeva (Höpfl, 2000), Cixous (Beavan, 2019), and Irigaray (Fotaki, 2013; Fotaki et al., 2013, 2014; Vachhani, 2015, 2020). The translation of this thread of French feminism stemming from the radical group *Psy-et-Po* (Psychanalyse et Politique) is grounded in the acknowledgment that feminist reflections on the gendered nature of language and the proposal of an *écriture féminine* (Cixous, 1976) constitutes a precious genealogy for studying organizations outside the canons of management theory (Pullen & Rhodes, 2015).

Although French and Italian feminisms are quite close as intellectual traditions and share a focus on language and writing, the former has been more widely translated in management and organization studies while the latter has been cited (Gherardi, 2005, 2007; Poggio & Gherardi, 2007, 2009; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008, 2015) or built upon (Shaw, 2010) only sparsely.

Historical sources show that feminist groups in the two countries were in contact. For example, in the early seventies Milanese collectives were in dialogue with the above-mentioned *Psy-et-Po group*, founded by Antoinette Fouque. The groups met and discussed feminist politics at several international meetings organized by the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* in France between 1972 and 1973.[3]

Theoretically, these French and Italian feminisms share an understanding of the body—and embodied language —as the symbolic origin of women as political subject (Gherardi, 2005). Contact and exchange between the groups in the two countries also involved translations and inspiration for feminist organizing practices. The idea of "unconscious practice," for example, is derived from the French group (Martucci, 2008; Melandri, 2000; Milan's Women Bookstore Collective, 1990), a sign of the deep connection between Milanese groups and French "psychoanalytical feminism" that is further supported by findings of the archival and ethnographic work conducted by one of the authors around the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective (1990) (Equi Pierazzini, 2019).[4] Furthermore, the very idea of establishing Italy's first women's bookstore in Milan (*Libreria delle donne di Milano*, founded in Milan in 1975) was inspired by the Paris Women's Bookstore (*Librairie des Femmes*) founded in 1974 by *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (Martucci, 2008; Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990).

Responding to the calls by Bell et al. (2019) for more diversity and by Harding et al. (2013) to draw inspiration from new bodies of theories and engage more deeply with major theorists, the main purpose of this contribution is to present practices and theories that were central in the development of the seventies Italian feminist movement (New Feminism, see Bracke, 2014)[5] to the organization-studies community and to reflect on the insights such feminist thinking may offer our study of organizing and organizations. We hope also to contribute to the moment of re-evaluation and heightened reception in different societal spheres of the contribution of Italian feminism of the seventies.[6]

We focus here on *partire da sé*, "departing from oneself,"[7] as a practical philosophy and politics of the symbolic grounded in experiential thinking (Buttarelli & Giardini, 2008), and explain its methodological features in light of and as a result of the crucial practice of *autocoscienza* (which can be translated as a political practice of consciousness-raising). *Autocoscienza* can in turn be understood as the historical root of *partire da sé*.

We chose this specific practice for our introduction to Italian feminism because it is a central example of the movement's intellectual and political constructs, working as it does with the intertwining of theory, political action and personal transformation as played out in the sphere of language. Indeed, we consider *partire da sé* an "anchor practice" (Swindler, 2001), the fundamental principle of orientation in practice common to the feminist movement of the seventies as a whole.

The feminist historiography and theory we build on here to disentangle the meaning of this practice and its possibilities for studying organization (see Boccia, 2002; Diotima, 1996; Muraro, 1996) could be ascribed in different ways to the "theoretical horizon that goes by the name of sexual difference thought" (Cavarero, 2002, p. 98).[8] We discuss in particular detail the work of philosopher Luisa Muraro (b. 1940) that underlies the linguistic element of practice. Together with Adriana Cavarero, Luisa Muraro is a key figure in the development of Italian feminism of difference (Restaino, 2002b) and a key mediator in the relationship with French feminism, as she was Irigaray's first Italian translator in the seventies (Casarino & Righi, 2018; Muraro, 2013). Considered one of the most "inventive, influential, and intransigent thinkers" of Italian feminist theory (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b, p. xxiii), Muraro's critique of the phallogocentric symbolic order develops along the same lines as Irigaray's (1998 [1974]) and Kristeva's (1985 [1974]) formulations, but ends up proposing neither a culture of difference (Irigaray, 2004 [1992]) nor a pre-discursive semeiotic order (Kristeva, 1985 [1974]) but rather a "symbolic order of the mother" (Muraro, 2006 [1991]). The paper is thus structured in two main parts. First, we present one of the key practices of seventies Italian feminism, "partire da sé" (potentially translated as departing from oneself, a rendering we reflect on below), and outline the historical milieu in which this practice was constituted (Nicolini, 2012, 2017). We then discuss some theoretical and methodological implications of *partire da sé* for organizational research.

2 | IT IS ALREADY POLITICS[9]: TWO ITALIAN FEMINIST PRACTICES, *AUTOCOSCIENZA* AND *PARTIRE DA SÉ*

The practice of *partire da sé* had its historical genesis in the early years of the second wave feminist movement in the practice of *autocoscienza*, which was widespread between 1970 and 1976 (Calabrò & Grasso, 2004 [1985]).

Before introducing these two constructs, we feel it is important to outline the way we use the term practice in the horizon of Italian feminist theory. First, as literature on the practice turn (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini, 2012) underlines, evoking the practice dimension entails making reference to a set of organized doings and sayings, embedded knowledge, effort, and dedication. Feminisms are indeed practice theories, not only insofar as they offer research insights into the way gender is constructed as (social) practice (Poggio, 2006) but also in that they present an inextricable and intertwined dimension of theorization and political praxis (Butler, 2004). The act of grounding theory in practice is indeed recognized as a central element also in the complex, contested, and varied theoretical horizon of Italian feminism of difference (Bono & Kemp, 1991; Cavarero, 2002; Dominijanni, 2010). If this aspect strongly distinguishes Italian feminism of difference from feminism of equality and rights, rather bringing it closer to gender theory, the feminism of difference moves away from the latter regarding the consequent processes of institutionalization of such theories derived from practices. Even when it had a link, even a close one, with an institution (suffice it to think of the philosophical community Diotima and the University of Verona), Italian feminism of difference has still privileged autonomous organizations, instead of setting up University programs or degrees, for example,[10] as sites for enacting the close relationship between theoretical and political work.

Therefore, practices are particularly relevant for our setting, as "Italian philosophers of difference operate primarily within the political practices of feminism and speculate on them rather than on the canonical texts of philosophy" (Cavarero, 2002, p. 97): the theoretical problems to tackle and questions to formulate emerge mainly from the context of the movement's needs and reflections. Finally, Italian feminisms as a whole also *produced* a set of actual practices (*autocoscienza* and *partire da sé*, to name practices common to Italian feminism of the Seventies, and *disparità* and *affidamento*, to name practices more directly ascribable to Italian feminism of difference). In the context of this contribution, therefore, practice also refers to the set of doing and sayings (Schatzki, 2001) generated in the specific socio-historical context of Italian feminism of difference and thus defines a specific political and linguistic work carried out by the movement. In doing political work, the new ideas women proposed were always accompanied by new expressions (theoretical work) and new actions (political work) and vice versa, as reflections often stemmed from activities as well.

Drawing on Dominijanni, Italian feminism of difference theorist and journalist, therefore, here is a possible definition of what practice signifies in the Italian feminist context:

> Practice is neither theory's younger sister nor a means subordinate to an end nor the concrete verification of an abstract ideal. It is [...] *a cut* in the established social-symbolic order, a cut that opens a space in which it is possible to publicly act and speak of what is repressed, forbidden or disavowed. This introduces to the political sphere questions and feelings usually considered unpolitical and thus shows that "not everything *is*, but everything can *become* political".

> Practice is, [...] a relational act which in turn enacts a relational subject, giving social form and visibility to the primary relationship with the mother that is foreclosed in the patriarchal symbolic order. It is a significant and performative act, which simultaneously modifies the person who performs it and the context in which it is performed. In this way, two divisions that usually block transformative and subversive movements are overcome: the split between the transformation of reality and the transformation of the self and the split between the palingenetic vision of future and repetitive behavior in the present. Last but not least, practice is an eminently, although not exclusively, linguistic act, which returns to language its function of mediation of social exchange, considering it a priority mediation with respect to those of which traditional politics makes use, such as organization, roles, rules, laws (Dominijanni, 2010, pp. 171, 172).[11]

This quote articulates the understanding of practice in Italian feminism: not a verification of feminist theories or a strategic behavior for pursuing a political objective but the happening of something, the opening of a possibility that operates through actions and language to produce change in the social-symbolic order. Practices are *political and performative* in that they aim to modify society and the subject involved in doing them, *relational* in that they are collectively bound together in a context of reciprocal exchange and the recognition of women as subjects of discourse and *linguistic* in that they entail a creative work of naming the new processes being ignited.

Having clarified the key position of practice in Italian feminism, we are now ready to delve into *autocoscienza* and *partire da sé*.

2.1 | Autocoscienza

Similarly to Europe and the United States (see Ferguson, 1984), in New Feminism emerged in Italy in the context of the new progressive movements of the Sixties (Ergas, 1985; Giachetti, 2005; Restaino, 2002a, 2002b). For women, participating in the 1968–1969 student and civil rights movements constituted a terrain for experiencing and learning about political engagement (Ergas, 1985) as well as for confirming their historical role as emancipated subjects. At the same time, it was also the grounds on which gender roles and contradictions exploded, leading women to leave mixed-gender political groups and establish specific, feminist forms of organizing (Calabrò & Grasso, 2004 [1985]; Bracke, 2014; Giachetti, 2005; Restaino, 2002b).[12] This separation was central in constituting feminism (Lumley, 2001) in that, in overcoming traditional forms of militancy and political practice, women started to enact new modes of aggregation and discussion and formulate new political concepts (Bracke, 2014; Restaino, 2002b). A specific form of engagement and organizing arose in this period (Ergas, 1985, p. 253, refers to them as "organizational structures of the movement"): what was called the "small group." Differing from both traditional parties and political groups and already-existing women's organizations,[13] small groups were capillary, decentralized and networked (Ergas, 1985) formations without any formal features. They had no headquarters, and meetings were held in private homes with very little structure in terms of roles.[14] Differing slightly in the focus of their critiques, these groups were similar overall in terms of two key

approaches: separatism (in relation to institutions and political parties) and the practice of consciousness raising (Bracke, 2014; Giachetti, 2005).

At its core, *autocoscienza* consisted in talking about ideas, experiences or anything related to the self in women-only contexts, often in private spaces such as houses and as part of the "small groups" that constituted the only relational setting for women to narrate themselves and their experiences. The space of *autocoscienza* was at once a physical and symbolic space where it was possible to consider as meaningful matter for discussion what have been previously understood as unpolitical or pre-political, for example experiences, feelings, and even silences. The process of speaking or "telling" about oneself was an "exploration of womanhood" (Bracke, 2014, p. 66) involving all the political themes related to the ability to construct a common political consciousness about bodies and subjectivities. First, therefore, *autocoscienza* functioned as a process of cognitive liberation in which sharing experiences in women-only relational settings made it possible to identify the commonalities of women's oppression. Second, it fostered the recognition of the personal and political importance of constructing relationships among women (Springer, 2005) as a structure enabling women's reciprocal recognition during a process of self-exposure (Cavarero, 2002). In the small groups, "telling about oneself" constituted a common relational exercise in which the presence of other women was crucial, as each participant both talked about herself and listened in turn. By taking turns to find the courage to speak in a public setting, entrusting other women as listeners, and then developing empathy in listening to the others and welcoming what they had to say, women were constructing a newfound political subjectivity. *Autocoscienza* was thus a fundamental step in the constitution of a new and unexpected consciousness, that of a woman who is recognized by another woman. As Muraro phrased it, this practice was "a strategy invented to fight against the imposition of starting from what others had established as truthful and right" (Muraro, 1996, p. 13). Carla Lonzi, co-founder of the early feminist group Rivolta Femminile and retrospectively regarded as the founding figure of Italian feminism of difference (Restaino, 2002a), observed in a private letter to a friend: "I believe that the most important element is trusting that the other wants you to be yourself. To find this other is the crucial thing" Lonzi wrote in a 1972 letter, as reported in Lonzi and Jaquinta (1985, p. 35).[15] Indeed, the feminist group Rivolta Femminile wrote in 1972 about the importance of small groups as the setting for a politics of recognition (see Harding et al., 2013), the reciprocal recognition of women as subjects: "women recognize one another as complete human beings" (Lonzi, 2010 [1974], p. 119).[16]

Third, *autocoscienza* engendered a fundamental recognition of the crucial political centrality of language, not only in women's oppression but also in their possible liberation. The political work mobilized in and through language was two-fold: women were reclaiming their voices not only as the right to speak on political matters, fighting oppression and launching new political agendas (e.g., the abortion law passed in Italy in 1978 after years of public mobilization by feminist groups) but also as the freedom to do so using a different voice, one not colonized by patriarchy, as Dominijanni (2018) argued:

> The original intuition of feminism of the seventies, that women were lacking not prostheses so as to resemble men, but needed the words to express themselves starting from their selves instead of from a male imaginary—in other words that the feminine condition is marked more by symbolic that social misery—had already provoked a break, sanctioning the primacy of the word in the politics of change. When reelaborated in the first person, the practice of self-consciousness had already proven that a silent or muzzled feminine experience, or one forced into social conforms, or into the imitation of male models, acquires another meaning and opens up new perspectives of signification; this practice can therefore inaugurate new narrative strategies of female life, in which foreordained fates gave way to a free construction of the self (Dominijanni, 2018 [1998], pp. 47, 48).

This quote clarifies that, in practicing *autocoscienza*, women began to consider their own experiences and words to be reliable. As such, it supported the act of assuming the authority to speak. *Autocoscienza* thus hinged primarily on language, first in that it entailed a *presa di parola*, (which can be translated as "speaking up" or "capturing

speech")[17] that helped constitute a common political consciousness among women, and second in that women's "expressing themselves from their selves" rather than "a male imaginary," as the above quote states, entailed training themselves to use a language that was as contextual, plain and close to their own experience as possible. *Autocoscienza* also allowed women to grant importance to their own experiences, to listen and give credit to them, and trained them to do so using a specific language (embodied, contextual, and relational) caught up in the tension of listening to these experiences in order to render them thinkable and sayable.[18] In the Italian socio-cultural context, *autocoscienza* came to acquire a very specific prominence, and its intense charge of political and theoretical significance made it highly influential in later feminist theorizing (De Lauretis, 1990, pp. 1–21)[19]; even when groups ceased practicing it, they continued to reflect on it, and the practice thus had "far more wide-reaching effects than the consciousness raising groups which had inspired it" (Bono & Kemp, 1991, p. 11).

2.2 | Partire da sé

The *autocoscienza* practice based on listening to and expressing lived experience constituted a legacy of thought and language, and it is within this legacy that the meaning of "departing from oneself" must be understood (Muraro, 1996). "This practice," wrote a Milan-based feminist collective, "left women's minds with an enduring delight in reasoning while remaining in contact with perceptible reality, and with the ability to use that contact with reality to formulate theoretical thought" (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990, p. 46). The legacy of *autocoscienza* thus sets the grounds on which feminist reflection about situated and experiential knowledge might flourish, constituting the terrain on which women were able to develop feminist epistemological tenets such as *partire da sé*, that is, a practical philosophy and politics of the symbolic grounded in experiential thinking (Buttarelli & Giardini, 2008) and expressed through contextual and material language. Therefore, *partire da sé* can be understood as the fundamental orientative principle derived from *autocoscienza*, and indeed this expression begins to appear in later theorizations.

To present it here, we draw primarily on the philosophical community Diotima, a central actor in the development of feminist theory in Italian language (Casarino & Righi, 2018; Restaino, 2002b) and Luisa Muraro, a prominent figure in this community together with Adriana Cavarero; the latter went on to distance herself from the idea in 1990, and her work was recently celebrated in the conference "Giving Life to Politics."[20] Muraro's thought is particularly suited to presenting the meaning of *partire da sé* and its linguistic implications. Her theoretical work (notably *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* and *To Knit or to Crochet*) and political work (e.g., her involvement with education—both at the university level and as a primary schoolteacher—and devotion to teaching writing in the political context of the Milan Women's Bookstore, the feminist bookstore she contributed to establish)[21] delve into the political stakes of paying attention to embodied and situated language; at the same time, she ended up formulating these theoretical and political concepts after years of militant participation in collectives (Dominijanni, 2018 [1998]). Muraro's theorization developed on the basis of her own experiences in the movement and in relation to the practices and ideas collectively generated in these contexts exemplifies the close connection between theoretical and political work in feminism of difference. Indeed, the guiding and orienting ideas (genealogy, symbolic mother, female freedom, female subject, etc.) of this strand of feminism are grounded in original feminist practices which are in turn granted formal expression in a theory with a marked philosophical and psychoanalytical orientation (*autocoscienza*, entrustment, disparity, female relations) (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 13; Equi Pierazzini, 2019).

Starting from the observation that sexual difference (and its ability to generate symbolic order) went unthought in Western knowledge (and philosophical and scientific knowledge in particular) until the advent of the feminism that took on the task of thinking about it, the Diotima community therefore proceeded to engage in philosophical conceptualization without relying on thoughts already formulated by the philosophical and scientific tradition. There are thus frequent references to returning to the radical meaning of thinking: an act that dismisses

those forms of knowledge built on the omission and erasure of difference. Departing from oneself is equivalent, in this sense, to thinking sexual difference and its symbolic power:

> The main finding of this practice [*partire da sé*] consists in going back to the source of the thinking and making decisions, by undoing the construction of what has been already thought out and decided [...] By doing that, what we can find out is the subject –myself –not in the subject position, but in that of complement position: I find myself in relation with others, inhabited by memories, pushed by desires. I therefore find desires that moves me, memories that inhabit me, Others, women or men, that talk to me, through me or even in my place, maybe to contradict me! (Muraro, 1996, pp. 20, 21)[22]

Here, Muraro emphasizes the practice of *partire da sé*as a feminist way of undoing what others have already thought and decided for women. This idea of discarding from the destinal role is also the condition to find a relationship with others and introduce freedom in the relationship. Muraro also makes clear that, in allowing women to express themselves and reject the already-thought-and-decided world, departing from oneself does not imply remaining on oneself:

> [...] It is a practice of displacement of the Self, with the place of the Self taken by a plurality of partial instances, in a game of cross-references upon which the newfound lightness allows us to float and shove off of. But the *partire da sé*pratice leads to the discarding of the subject without undoing it in a myriad of uncoordinated instances: it unmakes me in the relationships that make me who I am and make me become who I desire to become, without *me* being able to camp at the center of this being and becoming, *ever* (Muraro, 1996, pp. 20, 21).[23]

As the above quote suggests, *partire da sé* is an expression that indicates simultaneously being grounded in one's partial, non-exhaustive experience and, at the same time, avoiding being stuck in a female identity discourse—the proposal is not at all meant as a call for reunification in the direction of ontological female difference. It entails the idea of speaking from a specific point of view, a situated and partial standpoint (Haraway, 1988) that, as such, implicitly critiques the neutrality and point-of-viewlessness masking the universal value of male dominance (Cavarero, 1987, pp. 42–79; MacKinnon, 1983); at the same time, it also involves a process of discarding the fragmentation and atomization of the subject, and as such is quite distinct from an individualistic or intimate form of knowledge (Zamboni, 1996). The sexual difference from which the "departing from oneself" derives does not concern the one (the supposed woman), the two (man/woman difference, in an ontology of nature) or not even the many (the numerical addition of other sexes, beyond female and male). As Riccardo Fanciullacci has clearly written:

> the two of sexual difference [...] does not serve to count. The point is to understand that difference cuts across every singularity and prevents this from being entirely whole and, therefore, sufficient to itself. [...] To recognize oneself as cut across by sexual difference means recognizing that one can never start from scratch, but that one is always 'in the midst of many things already done, wrongly done, named, imposed, remedied or irremediable' (Muraro, 2013).

Once again, this process of separation from the self comes about not as a result of the individual's ability and independence, but thanks to the tight-knit web of relationships that oversees each person's positionality (Lonzi, 1980). It therefore stems from the act of entrusting carried out in relation to something that precedes us as individuals and, at the same time, is constantly transformed by our presence and therefore constantly re-treated. Rather than referring to a shift of subjectivity from interiority to exteriority, detachment from the self is about radically rethinking subjectivity in terms of relationships: the subject makes and remakes itself through relational

movements. The key point we can observe in this concept is the primacy of relationships, in particular political relationships between and among women.

Indeed, the Italian word *partire* signals two different yet dovetailing meanings, as *partire* means at once to begin and to leave/set forth (Muraro, 1996). To explain this point Muraro resorts to a figure, that of birth, which encompasses the act of beginning from something, a starting point, and simultaneously departure, leave-taking (Muraro, 2006 [1991]). In order to better express this dual meaning in English while advantage of the passage from our mother tongue to a foreign language, we have worked on and through language to shift from other translations of *partire da sé* as "starting from oneself" (Bracke, 2014) or "starting with oneself" (Cicogna & De Lauretis of Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990) to our translation of "departing from oneself."[24]

2.3 | Partire da sé and the contact word[25]

Departing from oneself materializes in the linguistic dimension, engendering a language that bears the mark of the materiality of speaking bodies and expresses a partial and non-exhaustive perspective.

Luisa Muraro's beautiful and complex text "To Knit or to Crochet" is devoted to reflecting on the political importance of contextual language (Muraro, 1998). In this book, Muraro engages with the theory of signification on the metonymical and metaphorical axis as developed by Roman Jakobson (1966). Muraro observes that signification by abstraction prevails in contemporary society, interpreting this as a sign of the neglect of material life and the tendency to rarefy experience, as this kind of language serves to obscure or eliminate experience. She instead explores the possibility of a language that is contextual instead of abstract, guided by the question searching "if and how there is a [form of] speaking marked by its material movement and as such, being a source of intelligence on the world" (Muraro, 1998, p. 115). Signification on the metonymical axis is interesting, according to Muraro, because it produces meaning by *indicating* rather than *re-presenting* things. As she explains:

> The specificity of both metonymy and synecdoche consists in that they are formed by means of relations that are discovered, not invented. [...] While metaphor leaps out from an original thought [pensata], metonymy plods along the path of lived experience. Thanks to metaphor, experience is reshaped as an ideal representation, while metonymy articulates experiences into its parts (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b [1998], pp. 70, 71).

According to Muraro, moreover, the symbolic order in which this kind of language can be practiced is the symbolic order of the mother in which "the matrix of life is for us also the matrix of the word" (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b [1991], p. 40). Muraro formulated this notion having taken as the starting point of her research Luce Irigaray's critiques of phallogocentrism and critical engagement with Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. Together with Carla Lonzi, Irigaray has been fundamental in the genealogy of the Italian feminism of difference (Casarino & Righi, 2018). The figure of the mother is central to understand the functioning of phallogocentrism: in the symbolic order of patriarchal societies, the mother is the one who gives life while the father is the one who grants access to the discursive and normative dimension. Entering into the symbolic order requires obliterating "the mother," that is, the feminine pole. Irigaray maintains that the patriarchal symbolic order is produced and reproduced through language and, therefore, feminist theory is called on to deconstruct it by revealing its phallocentric structure while at the same time constructing another, woman-centered language and symbolic sphere that celebrates femininity instead of devaluing it (Restaino, 2002a, 2002b). Julia Kristeva likewise engages with a critique of the Lacanian "symbolic order," but her aim (especially in Kristeva, 1985 [1974]) is not to create a new language or symbolic order but to valorize the pre-discursive sphere in which senses, materiality and affection predominate, understood as a feminine sphere.

> The order imposed by the law of the father, in Lacanian terminology, is called 'symbolic order', and in it the 'symbols' are words, discourses, that are different from images and 'signs'. These belong to the pre-oedipal phase, preceding the mirror phase, that phase that Kristeva will privileges as 'semeiotic order' – of the mother ¬ opposing it to the phase of the 'symbolic order' of the father (Restaino, 2002b, p. 50).

Kristeva likewise viewed the relationship with the mother as a primary experience of signification (the concept of semiotic chora) that is overshadowed and surpassed in favor of the ender in the symbolic order. Muraro shares this understanding with Kristeva, but maintains that the radical difference between semiotic and symbolic order (what Kristeva calls the thetic break) and the obliteration of the relationship with the mother is not an actual (linguistic) necessity, "the expression of an historically determined symbolic order" (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b [1991], p. 43); rather, this break is a symptom of patriarchal domination.

Thus, starting from a common recognition of destabilizing language as way to upset the patriarchal order (Cavarero, 1987, pp. 42–79; Cixous, 1976 [1975]; Fotaki, 2013; Irigaray, 1998 [1974], Kristeva, 1985 [1974]; Muraro, 1994), and the binary economy articulating it, the *pars construens* of these three philosophers is different: Irigaray positions in the *outside* of the binary economy that exceeds it and yet sustains it: voicing the feminine—the silent object-is a way to disrupt the masculine subject; Kristeva positions in the *before*: voicing what is before the articulation of language itself (Cavarero, 2002); Muraro *dissolves* the patriarchal binary economy by *theorizing* a coincidence of body (the feminine) and thought (the masculine) in the same locus: the maternal figure.

In the Symbolic Order of the Mother the figure of the mother represents the co-generation of being in the world and learning how to speak: "the world was born together with us and with our knowing how to speak" (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b [1991], p. 75).

It is important to underline that the mother is a "symbolic realistic" figure, according to Muraro. This means that the "mother" is not a metaphor for something else; it neither stands for other meanings (e.g., "womanhood," "mother-sphere," or other abstractions of the qualities of motherhood or generativity) and nor indicates an erasure of the actual work done by actual mothers. "Mother" is both literal (i.e., her own mother, to whom she oftentimes refers) and symbolic, that is to say, a figure of the co-existence of body-language as primary faculties, experienced in a context of dependence and partiality into which we are thrown. Muraro refers to this as the "non-metaphorical symbolicity of the mother" (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b [1991], p. 19).

According to Muraro, this exchange between body and word—what the philosopher calls "the circle of flesh"—is "without any absolute priority to one or the other" (2018 [1991], p. 75). This feature is highly relevant, as in this case Muraro is saying that there is no perfect overlap but rather an "abyssal distance"[26] between "experience and its signification" (Muraro, 2018a, 2018b [1991], p. 93), that the speaker should not seek to fill the abyss but should rather try to stay as close as possible to the edge of it. She thus advocates for a partial, relational and ordinary language that is closely tied to experience and the context that generates it. In fact, this very gap is what makes language alive and inclined to change, "as we speak in ways with which we attempt to articulate and verbalize our experiences—to close the "abyssal" gap, per *impossibile*. Through our attempts, the languages we inhabit continually evolve" (Stone, 2018, p. X).

The resulting type of language, what Ida Dominijanni (2018 [1998]) suggests we call "the contact word," is thus a language the speaker engages humbly and carefully—"being an apprentice of what is happening, attempting to translate it" (Lonzi 1978, p. 42)—in order to avoid abstractions and generalizations.

This is the radical reason why *partire da sé* is a practice (more than a method): it cannot simply be learned and replicated but rather involves the speaker and requires that she engage anew in the process each time. This process is almost a training, caught up in a tension striving for the (impossible) closure of the "abyssal gap" between words and experience. The awareness of this gap between experience and words, and the use of this gap as the source of the *partire da sé* practice, entails the voluntary renunciation of any claim to exhaustiveness in representing experience.

The political implication of practicing a language closely tied to experience in the process of "giving name and form to reality assuming one's own gendered position" (Boccia, 2002, p. 50) entails breaking with the unison or "agreement" between men and reality (Lonzi 1978) that generates the universality of masculine language and thinking. It involves beginning to think instead from our own relationship with experience rather than from already-made ideas, namely those ideas that supposedly coincide with our roles, thus engendering a Self that does not act in conformity or accordance with what has been chosen for her or him (Boccia, 2002, p. 50). Indeed, it is in language that "the bond between patriarchal symbolic order and social order" is played out and "the 'staging of normality' takes place and conformism is born, develops and gradually becomes the norm" (Dominijanni, 2018 [1998], p. 45). Here lies the political import of the *partire da sé* practice, as well as the legacy of *autocoscienza*. As Luisa Muraro explains:

> With feminist consciousness-raising, the unthought ceased to provoke defensive re- actions, in order to become food for thought, that which makes one think. (…) The awareness of being elsewhere and otherwise—this is what it means to be conscious of oneself: not letting oneself be found within the trajectories of power, within its predictions, exposed to its manipulations; to exist in relation and in the verbal exchange of an autonomous and liberating practice. (…)

> We need to know how to give up any truth, even the dearest or most solid, to render speakable what the dominant discourse, even in our head, has silenced and which, because of this muteness, makes our experience insipid and our reality unreal (Muraro, 2009, pp. 60, 62).

Departing from oneself also entails the possibility of "not letting oneself be found" (Muraro, 2009, p. 60), of not being where we are expected to be, specifically seeking to escape from what has already been said and thought for us and thereby leaving our supposed role vacant.

3 | DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have presented the feminist practice of *partire da sé*, as this has constituted an "anchor practice" (Swindler, 2001) in Italian feminist movement of the seventies and we understand the articulation of this practice as particularly insightful for our study of organizing and organizations.

In summary, *partire da sé* is the term coined by some Italian feminist thinkers to refer to a practical philosophy that deals with finding the right words to name the links between subjects and the world, as well as the varied richness of these links that often goes unnoticed. First and foremost, this practice brings about a change in relationships. Refusing to look at any relationship as a constraint determined by extrinsically defined roles, relationships are instead understood as reciprocally acknowledged bonds (including bonds of dependence). Such links cannot be expressed by resorting to knowledge which is already established and codified: in fact, it is necessary to return to the level of experience and take into consideration precisely those aspects that escape codification, such as desire and contradiction (Diotima, 1996). "Departing from oneself" is a political practice of the symbolic and it is in this sense that we might identify some points of contact with standpoint epistemologies.

In this section, we would like to discuss how we see the *partire da sé* practice and Muraro's thought as a source of inspiration for organization studies. Our aspiration here is to enrich the numerous organization studies works building on feminist theorists to develop their critical reflections in and about the discipline by making cultural references more diverse (Bell et al., 2019) and engaging extensively with feminist theorists and theory (Harding et al., 2013). In so doing, we follow the path of other scholars such as Höpfl (2000), Fotaki et al., (2014), and Vachhani (2012, 2019, 2020) who have engaged with the work of some previously overlooked feminist theorists working in the tradition of French psychoanalytical feminism. Indeed, in the critical project of unveiling

the dominance of masculine, rational (Rhodes & Pullen, 2008) texts which are functional to the creation of an abstract and universal science and gender-neutral research (Pullen, 2006), many scholars have turned to the study of feminist theory, giving particular attention to the body of work by Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva.

By (partially and synthetically) introducing an intellectual tradition which has both affinity with better-known French feminism but also its own specific developments, our concern is that the flourishing and important body of research on writing outside the canon in management and organization studies (Pullen & Rhodes, 2015) rely on a rich and diverse pool of intellectual traditions, geopolitical arenas and theories. The arena for conversation on feminist politics can be diversified by *broadening* the field in the direction of more inclusivity and less ethnocentrism (Prasad et al., 2020) and, as we argue, by *contextualizing* feminist theories and politics, explaining the historical formations of theories and introducing micro- and local histories. An example of this work is Gherardi and Poggio's (2009) clarification of the notion of "memory work" by narrating the events surrounding a 1980 German feminist collective based in Hamburg (citing Haug, 1987). Doing this *contextualizing* work is a way of maintaining the visibility of feminist genealogies within the critical voices in writing management and the discipline in general, as there is always a risk of obliteration given the way 'science' tends to remember certain (male) authors over others (women and feminists) (see Pullen, 2006 and Fotaki et al., 2014, on the issue of obliteration; see also an example of an effort to combat women's obliteration in the making of the history of the field is the 2020 series edited by Allison Pullen and Robert McMurray Routledge Focus on Women Writers in Organization Studies). An example of such erasure is the absence of an explicit and articulated treatment of feminist theories in genealogical reconstructions of the intellectual traditions influencing a theory of practice in a very influential work on practice theories (see Nicolini, 2012).

Indeed, the task we are about to take on—investigating what a translation of the feminist practice of *partire da sé* might look like in organizational research—entails the above-mentioned risk of obliteration. We are not searching for the radical novelty of a breakthrough, an understanding of the scientific enterprise that is masculine and has already been contested by feminists (see Casarino & Righi, 2018). Seeking only the radical and new tends to obliterate the micro-stories of achievements by theories and voices while reproducing only the mainstream account. Instead, our aim here is to cite diverse and previously overlooked thinkers to introduce new narrations, stories and voices in feminist discourse (Hemmings, 2011) and to do so by using the vocabulary and theoretical references of the intellectual tradition in which they formed instead of "colonizing" them with expressions stemming from other traditions. This is also why we have used Italian feminist historiography and theory in the process of historically and theoretically contextualizing the practices and authors introduced here, tapping into expressions, labels and theories of this same intellectual *milieu*. There is value in *remembering* the local histories grounding theoretical concepts, thus broadening the space of research towards a multiplicity of localized stories that recount the depth and richness of feminist history and heritage. Such remembering has taken place through our own relationships built through and around the doctoral studies of one of the authors. She has transposed the memories of Italian feminism of difference, especially the memories of the Milan Women's Bookstore, across different countries and embodied the encounter between different practices of scholarship, between philosophy, history and organization studies. It is the traces left by this movement of memories and by our associated conversations that we want to sketch out here so as to begin translating the *partire da sé* practice in organizational research.

As other feminisms have highlighted, we would also like to reaffirm the idea of our own engagement—*starting from and with ourselves*—with research as a productive, knowledge-generating opportunity as well as our refusal of any possible absolute or abstract positioning of the research subject in the text. Such an approach is in line with second wave Western feminist epistemologies which have critiqued the notion of neutrality and universality (MacKinnon, 1983), the neat separation between object and subject, the constitution of the two categories (Hawkesworth, 1987; Hekman, 1987; Hemmings, 2011) and the critical notions proposed as a result of standpoint epistemologies (Hartsock, 1987 [1983], pp. 157–180; Harding 1987, 1993, 2004; Haraway, 1988). Indeed, Luisa Muraro's work reveals the complicity between social and symbolic order, underlining the political implications of

"the masculine metalanguage that transcends the world" (Casarino & Righi, 2018, p. 24); in so doing, it can enrich research pathways in management and organization studies that are interested in critical works capable of indicating new avenues for a different kind of writing (Gilmore et al., 2019). Granting primacy to the role of the relational web in which the subject is caught, the Italian feminist tradition theorizes the notion of *pensiero dell'esperienza* ("the thinking of experience") (Buttarelli & Giardini 2008). By virtue of her own experience, finitude and suffering in and with the world, a relational subject acquires a sort of "competence on the world" (Muraro, 2006 [1991]; Libreria delle Donne di Milano, 1987). These two expressions capture the fallacies of a supposedly objective, non-involved subject in the practice of research, and the way that feeling-thinking go hand in hand in processes of developing knowledge about the world (on thinking as always already feeling, cf. Muraro, 1996).[27]

More specifically, we believe that Muraro's insistence on a metonymic language bears promise for change in organizational writing. As we have outlined above, Muraro encourages a contextual language—a "contact word" (Dominjanni, 2018 [1998])—to reject what she calls a regime of hyper-metaphoricity. This regime implies a game of abstractions—characterized, as explained in Höpfl's (2000) essay on Kristeva, by representational purity, cleanliness and alienation. Instead of the dominance of the metaphor, Muraro suggests restoring a metonymic system of significations that is instead tarnished by the world, a material, embodied language. Materiality in this case refers not only to taking care and considering the (multiple) gendered positions of the writer/speaker (Fotaki et al., 2014; Pullen, 2006) or the history of enabling technical apparatuses (Muhr & Rehn, 2015), but also a specific *style* of language itself that results in *naming* the relational, spatial and temporal dependences from which language originates. By naming these dependences this language is marked by them, it is *in-formed* about them, and simultaneously it is a language that does not merely represent experience, but is able to summon it and *get it in form*.

Another aspect of the *partire da sé* practice that we believe might transform our organizational writing is the relational understanding of the subject. Muraro's work is devoted to exploring a possible comprehensive theory that overcomes the patriarchal symbolic order by articulating the notion of the symbolic order of the mother. With this notion, the philosopher formulates an alternative to the patriarchal system by proposing another symbolic order ("a language, a theory, a life practice", Restaino, 2002b, p. 73), not the one ruled by the "law of the father" (Lacan, 2013 [2005], 2017, pp. 129–231 [1998], Borch-Jacobsen, 1991 [1990]) but rather one centered on the mother as an onto-epistemological nexus (Casarino & Righi, 2018) offering a theoretically specific way of overcoming the (patriarchy's) binary economy opposing mind and body (Cavarero, 2002). This theory might be a way of dodging the risk implicit in the *écriture feminine* perspective, that is, the risk of falling into a static exaltation of the feminine pole, as Muhr and Rehn (2015) have argued. Following Muraro's perspective, the locus of resisting dominant power norms is not the gendered body but a shift consisting in acting in accordance with a symbolic order in which we recognize the co-generation of body and speech—with all its implications in terms an ethics of relationality, dependence and donation—thus offering a fruitful canvas for developing research building on feminist philosophy to achieve more inclusive, ethical and loving organizations (Vachhani, 2015, Vachhani & Pullen, 2019) in which subjects recognize their interdependence (Fotaki et al., 2014). Indeed, we have also clarified the meaning of sexual difference in Luisa Muraro's thought, underlining that it is neither about a one (the supposed woman) or a two (the man/woman difference) or even gender multiplicity, but rather a cut in every singularity, making it plural and partial.

By clarifying the meaning of sexual difference in Muraro's thought, we hope to have contributed to these voices rejecting the critique of essentialism oftentimes directed at feminisms of difference (notably in Luce Irigary, see Fotaki et al., 2014, Vacchani, 2019).

We envisage a writing about organizations that is composed by and through relationships between the researcher/speaker/writer and others: it is through these others that the researcher makes and remakes herself as such and yet different. This shift from thinking of subjectivity as identity to thinking of it as a process of continuous formation and transformation through relations—we propose to call this *relationing*—has been previously discussed in organization studies. Barbara Czarniawska, for example, has written about "the tyranny of identity" and promoted a shift from identity to alterity (Czarniawska, 2008), following Tarde's work. While Czarniawska's reasoning

about the interplay between identity and alterity focused primarily on the possibilities of a new understanding of so-called corporate image and identity, we would like to apply a similar reasoning to the practice of organizational writing itself and focus on the relationing between the researcher/speaker/writer/teacher and different others, enlightened by *partire da sé*. We envisage an organizational writing in which interdependence is recognized, as argued by Fotaki et al. (2014), but also *in-formed* by it, that is to say where interdependence is indicated, given visibility in the very fabric of the published texts or summoned in the contexts of public oral gatherings. Muraro herself intersperses her work by referencing her involvement in the movement and the fact that she is indebted to it for her theorizations (Dominijanni, 2018 [1998]). We believe this referencing the others has powerful implications for our practice of speaking at conferences and writing papers. This is what a metonymic writing might imply in practice: naming the relational, spatial and temporal dependences from which language originates. In other words, the argument put forward here is that the generation of ideas is a relational process occurring in the space in between subjects—in and outside of academia—and through interactions between them, and that we propose a writing that makes these interactions and relations visible.

In this relational process that constitutes writing management and organization, we have in mind others in the organizational lives about which we are writing. Rather than objectifying them or subjectifying our writing about them into mere subjective writing, we need to develop a respondent engagement with the "reality" in which our writing unfolds. The necessary contextuality of *partire da sé*, and the practice of relationing in writing, have practical implications in doing research about organizations. Following the co-generation of body and language and making our writing relational also means recognizing a bodily engagement in the field, as Thanem and Knights (2019) have recently emphasized.

We also have in mind others in the various disciplines across which we are writing. We see the importance of developing an organizational writing that respectfully engages with other disciplines and recognizes the genealogy of ideas and language while at the same time contributing to remaking them. Rejecting calls for making organization, and even management, studies stronger by means of conventional cumulative science, we aspire to organizational writing that constructs itself by engaging "seriously" and "differently" with other disciplines. This call has been made, for example, as regards the relationship between anthropology and organization studies (Czarniawska, 2012), and we would like to stress here, in light of a writing that departs from oneself, the importance of also engaging with history and philosophy (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014, pp. 535–588). Our aim in this paper is to particularly emphasize the importance of taking into consideration the social and historical milieu as well as the current manifestation of organizational life at hand (Equi Pierazzini, 2019). To this end, we would respect the "dual integrity" principle (Maclean et al., 2016) in carrying out organizational historical research (Rowlinson, 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

In presenting the practical philosophy construct of Italian feminism, *partire da sé*, to which Muraro is indebted, we have aimed to contextualize it—albeit synthetically—in the development of the movement's practices and specifically in its relation to consciousness-raising groups. This not only represents an effort of "historical cognizance" (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014) in the process of engaging with historical theory and historiography in organization research (Rowlinson et al., 2014), it also serves to show the importance of feminist organizing (Acker, 1995, Brown, 1992) and movements in building theory (Butler, 2004). Specifically, we hope that our text has offered a situated example of how women organized themselves to access a different symbolical order (Fotaki et al., 2014) through *autocoscienza*, in which the starting condition was of the impossibility of auto-signification, given that language was understood as already colonized by the male symbolic (Gherardi, 2005), and began the process of formulating an embodied and material, relational language and experiential knowledge. As Gherardi (2005) and Gherardi and Poggio (2009) have written, feminist theory and practice arrive at its central methodological constructs through storytelling and narrating, processes which enable the exercise of reflexive thought, the re-appropriation of experience, and self-awareness.

Finally, we would like to encourage the possibility of *displacing oneself* in organizational writing so as to *go to the world's ends*.[28] If starting from and with oneself implies making our partiality visible and accountable in writing and

relationing emphasizes difference and otherness as a source of making and remaking the self, it is important to enact these practices together with the displacement of oneself, this leading us to take (many) steps into the world rather than drawing a circle around ourselves. The line between starting from oneself to remain in one's own circle and starting from oneself to be in the world is fine indeed. As a political and existential practice, our learning from Italian feminism of difference calls for devoting extreme care to the so-called context, to ensure the processuality of writing—our personal lives, our relationships with our colleagues and friends, the world that gives us matter to think about, the labor of the others who support our possibility to write—and to resist the academic pressure to write a lot while saying little. Since relationality is not only about others displacing us but also about us being the context for others' growth, we shall not only be held accountable for what we do but also collectively and personally hold others accountable for the motives, desires and objectives behind their writing.

For us, this going to the world's end—and writing to say something, rather than little—is a practice of hope and necessity for change in academia at a time when more and more scholars employed in academia (with or without permanent positions) are deciding to quit the university and its environment, as the "quit literature" (Coin, 2017; Macharia, 2013) testifies. This literature, composed of essays but also small articles and mainly written from an autobiographical point of view, is also interesting for us as examples of departing from oneself. Essentially, these narratives are all about not being found where you are expected and at the same time changing precisely the (academic) context in which you are expected to be.

4 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we provide a brief and partial introduction to a core practice in the context of Italian feminism, *partire da sé*. Primarily employing Italian feminist theory and historiography from the tradition of thought that goes by the name Italian feminism of difference, we offered a contextualized narration of the development of *partire da sé* as well as a possible definition of it. We underlined in particular the implications of this practical philosophy and politics of the symbolic grounded in experiential thinking (Buttarelli & Giardini, 2008) in terms of using a contextual language and introduced the work of Italian feminist philosopher Luisa Muraro to clarify the features and political implications of such language.

Inspired by the practice of *partire da sé* as theorized by Italian feminism of difference over the last 40 years, in this paper we attempted to offer a translation into practice of writing differently about organizations and, specifically, proposed three ways of making organizational writing different: *departing from oneself, relationing, and displacing oneself*. Taken together, we see these practices as a possibility for renewing organizational writing by making it more real, relevant and respondent to ourselves as an academic community and the world. Such writing will bear the traces of the context that has generated it, the desires of those who have written it, and the recognition of others as subjects. Its political effects entail putting the personal life experience of the person writing at risk and addressing the topics in question radically, rather than simply thematizing them in the text. In this sense, the resulting texts enact the issues or topics they treat and in so doing have an effect on reality: they become performative texts, defined by Rippin (2015) as engaging on different levels beyond the intellectual one and calling for an embodied response. This has very serious implications for doing research as, in line with other feminist ethics (Fotaki et al., 2014), the person who is writing should feel connected to her/his text and bounded to act in accordance with the critical words they write. Only in this way can theory morph into political praxis.

Writing this paper on Italian feminism and its language has been a challenging task considering that it takes us into the mists of translation, both among disciplines and between languages. Specifically, the translation from our mother tongue to English that played out in both thinking about and translating Italian texts and historical documents was a difficult yet interesting exercise, forcing us to favor greater simplicity in our words.[29] The translation among disciplines has perhaps left traces as well, as the footnote apparatus suggests. We have taken care to ensure the readability of the essay, however; the structure and they style of the paper have been left purposely narrative

and not neutral, and we believe some passages retain the echo of Italian. We have tried to intersperse the text with "showing not telling" (Denzin, 2014 in Beavan, 2019). This approach is dear to feminist epistemologies and can be found, for example, in the Italian tradition through the work of the Diotima philosophic community (Diotima, 1987).

Finally, we would like to reflectively mention that the writing of this text has been accompanied throughout by love and solidarity and these have operated as an organizing force (Vachhani, 2015, Vachhani & Pullen, 2019), as well as a drop of happiness, for our involvement in the endeavor of translating this stream of feminism into organization theory.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The statement has been filled in Manuscript Central. As the paper is conceptual, there is no "empirical" data available.

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ENDNOTES

[1] See Lewis, 2014 for a critical re-evaluation and exploration of the concept in organization studies.

[2] Gherardi (2005), to our understanding, says a similar thing in a different way when she reflects on using gender instead of sex as an ideological strategy to avoid bringing the politics of relations between the sexes into the discourse and to question masculinity.

[3] Specifically, the first one took place in La Tranche-sur-Mer in Vendée in late June (24 June–2 July); the second, during the autumn of the same year in Vieux-Villez, near Rouen (27 October–1 November); the third in Évreux in the summer of 1973 (see Giardini, 2011; MLF, 2018; Picq, 2011, Schiavo, 2002, Sottosopra, 1973).

[4] In the Libreria delle donne Archive at Fondazione Badaracco in Milan, Italy, there are various leaflets and manifestos of books published by Des Femmes and some Des Femmes movement calendars (ALD at FB, Milan, section "Manifesti", Des Femmes, 1977–1978, Paris, 3.3. B. 1, F. 5).

[5] The term "New Feminism" is employed to distinguish the movement arising in the late Sixties and late Seventies from the feminism of the second half of the nineteenth and first 2 decades of the twentieth century, making it part of the transnational movement commonly referred to as "Second Wave Feminism." The wave periodization is complex and problematic, however, as the wave metaphor suggests a succession of ruptures rather than underlining the points of continuity in women's political action (Bracke, 2014, Laughlin & Castledine, 2011). Postcolonial feminism and queer studies have also contributed to critiques of the wave periodization and the way it is focused on the experience of white women in North America and Europe while obscuring other traditions of gender resistance (Hogan, 2016; Springer, 2005). A reflection on this point can also be found in the organization studies literature (see for example Bell et al., 2019; Prasad et al., 2020).

[6] Italian radical feminism is undergoing a phase of increasing interest, in Europe and North America, as recent research and exhibitions suggest. We refer here to the activities of the London-based project *Feminist Duration Reading Group* that in 2015 and 2016 was involved in analyzing Italian feminist texts by Carla Lonzi, Luisa Muraro and the Milan Bookstore Collective (Feminist Duration: The Milan Women's Bookshop Collective and the Practice of the Unconscious, held on 7 June 2016, SPACE Mare Street, London; Now You Can Go project and seminars, 1–13 December 2015, Goldsmith University London). Rising interest in Italian feminism is further evidenced by a number of recent publications on this topic as well as translations of key texts. See for example Casarino and Righi (2018), Martinis Roe (2018), Muraro (2018a, 2018b), Ventrella, F., Zapperi, G (2020, forthcoming). Such attention to Italian feminism is particularly evident in the field of contemporary art, considering both artistic practices (See e.g. the work of artists such as Alex Martinis Roe, Claire Fontaine and Chiara Fumai (1978–2017)) and recent exhibitions such as "Feminism in Italian contemporary art" by Paola Ugolini at Richard Saltoun Gallery in London (2 October–9 November 2019).

[7] For an explanatory statement of the English translation chosen by us, see below, paragraph "*Partire da sé*", in particular the conclusion of the section.

[8] For this and for all the other instances in this paper, quotes from Italian texts without translated editions have been translated directly by us.

[9] We refer here to the title of a 1977 Rivolta Femminile Collective book entitled "È già politica" (Chinese et al., 1977).

[10] Indeed, the resistance toward "academic feminism" (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019) a figure that stands for dealing with feminism without engaging with the feminist politics and movements, has been a common feature of many second wave feminisms in western world (Pravadelli, 2010). The relation between feminist movement and academy is still a feature of some contemporary debate, see for example Godard (2006) and hooks (1994).

[11] Italics in the original. The author's reference in quoting the expression "not everything is, but everything can become political" is Lia Cigarini and Luisa Muraro, "Politica e pratica politica," in L. Cigarini (ed.), La politica del desiderio, Parma: Pratiche, 1995, pp. 219–228.

[12] The first wave of women's "exodus" from political parties and student and workers' groups took place in late 1968, and a second one in the second half of the seventies when the contradictions of the "double shift" of working in both feminist and extra-parliamentary groups became unbearable for the vast majority of them (Calabrò & Grasso, 2004 [1985]; De Lauretis, 1990).

[13] This does not mean that small groups were the only form of women's politics, but they did represent new types of political action and organizing specific to second wave feminism, borrowing some tools of political struggle, such as separatism, from Black liberation organizations.

[14] The first groups were: DEMAU, founded in Milan in 1966, Trento's *Cerchio Spezzato* founded in 1968, *Rivolta Femminile* in Rome and Milan, and *Anabasi* in Milan in 1970 (see Calabrò & Grasso, 2004 [1985]; Spagnoletti, 1974 [1971]).

[15] Letter to Gabriella Kristeller, 26th March 1972, quoted in M. Lonzi and Jaquinta (1985), p. 35. The English translation is ours.

[16] Rivolta Femminile was indeed one of the first feminist groups to adopt consciousness raising as a political practice (Calabrò & Grasso, 2004 [1985]) and one of the few that continued to practice it well after its demise around 1975 (Boccia, 2002; Lonzi, 1978). The English translation is ours.

[17] We offer these two possible translations as they both refer to social, student and women's movement literature. Specifically, "speaking up" is an expression widely used in literature on women's movements. See for example Bull (2006) Speaking Out and Silencing Culture, Society and Politics in Italy in the 1970s. London: Routledge. The capture of speech is instead a translation more connected to the '68 movements. Indeed, it is the English translation ("The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings of a Michel de Certeau" (De Certeau, University of Minnesota Press 1998) of Michel de Certeau's text "La Prise de parole et autres écrits politiques" (1994, Edition du Seuil). The same expression is used by feminist historian Anne Maude Brake in her essay "Women's 1968 Is Not Yet Over": The Capture of Speech and the Gendering of 1968 in Europe" (Bracke, A.M. 2018 *The American Historical Review*, 123/3, 753–757). The use of the expression "capture of speech" as a possible translation for *presa di parola* and the reference to de Certeau's texts are a suggestion kindly offered to us by Sergia Adamo, to whom we are grateful.

[18] Mobilizing a vocabulary coming from social sciences, this could also be framed as a type of reflexive process of agentic disentification from patriarchy. We thank one anonymous reviewer for indicating this possible further avenue for research.

[19] As is further possible to infer by analyzing contemporary feminist reflections (Femminile, 1972) and ex post theorizations (Boccia, 2002; Cavarero, 2002; Muraro, 1996, Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1987) on the meaning and elements of the *autocoscienza* practice.

[20] Giving life to politics: the work of Adriana Cavarero. University of Brighton, 19–21 June 2017 (Keynote Speakers Adriana Cavarero, Judith Butler, and Bonnie Honig).

[21] Muraro was involved in the 68 students movement while serving as an assistant to philosopher Gustavo Bontadini at the Milan Catholic University (Muraro, 2008, 2013), taught in primary schools in the suburbs of Milan (Muraro, 1998), and contributed to reflections on anti-authoritarianism in education (with feminist thinker Lea Melandri and psychoanalyst Elvio Fachinelli) (Fachinelli et al., 1971). She then taught at the University of Verona, where in 1983 she founded together with others (including Chiara Zamboni, Wanda Tommasi, Annamaria Piussi, Giannina Longobardi, Gloria Zanardo, Diana Sartori, Adriana Cavarero) the already mentioned Diotima philosophical community. Other educational efforts that took place in the context of the women's bookstore are the Scuola di Scrittura Pensante (School of Thinking Writing), the philosophically oriented writing school http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/puntodivista/scuola-di-scrittura-pensante-anno-2014/– last accessed 08-07-2019 and the "Accademia delle piccole filosofe, aperta anche ai piccoli filosofi", a Philosophy Academy for Children that Muraro held free of charge for all children willing to participate, in the Milan area.

[22] The translation from Italian is ours.

[23] The translation from Italian is ours. We chose to use the term "displacement" rather than "decentering" (which is the literal translation of the text "una pratica di decentramento dell'io" [Muraro, 1996, p. 20]) because we wanted to stress the idea of movement, the condition of changing places as well as the feeling of the unknown and being lost that the term captures.

[24] This reflection on translating the expression *partire da sé* from Italian to English was also presented by Linda Bertelli and Marta Equi Pierazzini at the 8th International Conference of Feminist Studies at Paris Nanterre, August 2018, see Bertelli, L., and Equi Pierazzini, M (2018).

[25] 'The Contact Word' is the title of Ida Dominijanni's introductory essay to the 1998 edition of Muraro's 'To Knit or to Crochet' (Dominijanni, 2018 [1998]).

[26] Muraro specifies that "abyssal" is not used to measure distance—big, huge, very deep, small—but to state its quality: it cannot be filled.

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

[28] We borrow this expression from the title of the 2014 edition of the Milan's Women Bookstore's Scuola di Scrittura Pensante: "Partire da sé e arrivare ai confini del mondo" (Departing from oneself and arrive at world's ends).

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

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