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Knitting Feminist Politics: Exploring a Yarn-Bombing Performance in a Postdisaster City

Manuela Farinosi and Leopoldina Fortunati

Abstract
The aim of this article is to explore urban knitting as a worldwide social movement, rather than solely a kind of ''inoffensive urban graffiti'' made with knitted fabric. Building on the available literature and original research, the article argues that this movement weaves together elements from craftivism, domesticity, handicraft, art, and feminism. It then explores a specific urban knitting initiative, called ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' (''Let's patch it''), carried out in L'Aquila, Italy, 3 years after the earthquake that devastated the city in 2009. To analyze the sociopolitical aspects of this initiative, a series of qualitative research studies was conducted over time, to which were added semi structured interviews with the initiative's local organizers. The findings show that the initiative in L'Aquila clearly exhibits the five original features of the urban knitting movement that emerge from the literature as being characteristic of this movement.

Keywords
Urban knitting, social movement, feminism, craftivism, citizenship engagement

Introduction: The Subversive Culture of Urban Knitting

The aim of this article is to investigate, through the lens of a specific initiative in Italy, the political features and meaning of a transnational social movement called urban knitting. This movement (also known as ''yarn bombing'' or ''guerrilla lace'') is said to have emerged in the United States in 2005, when yarn store owner Magda Sayeg formed a group called ''Knitta Please,'' which began to wrap public architecture in colorful displays of knitted and crocheted clothes. Since then, many individual and collective activists around the world have followed the example of this group, decorating various types of places with fiber for a variety of reasons. Their installations always have positive connotations and are mainly intended to create good feelings. As Sayeg pointed out during an interview, ''no-one knits for hate, you knit for love most of the time [...] my work brings this human quality to an otherwise sort of unhuman environment'' (Buden, 2012). The main purpose of these initiatives is generally to improve the urban environment, transforming the meaning of the ''bombed'' space, as well as its function. The installations are usually community oriented and intended to draw public attention to relevant social and political problems, such as war (e.g., the artwork ''Pink M.224 Chaffee'' by Marianne Jorgensen); violence against women (e.g., the installation ''The power of silence'' created in New Delhi by female victims of violence); wealth inequality; and nuclear activity (Moore & Prain, 2009; Parker & Pollock, 1987). Through urban knitting, the old-fashioned technique of knitting changes its value and meaning, becoming an effective medium of citizen engagement, activism, and protest, and a way to contribute to sociopolitical discourse and engagement (Gavin, 2007; Greer, 2007; Wills, 2007). Given that many countries consider this kind of installation illegal, as they do traditional graffiti, activists usually prepare the panels in advance and then erect them during the night. However, in contrast to graffiti, the effects of these installations are nonpermanent, as they can be removed easily with scissors without damaging the cityscape or the objects and buildings that have been

"bombed" (Moore & Prain, 2009; Waterhouse, 2010; Werle, 2010). Perhaps it is for its nonaggressive and temporary way of reconfiguring the public space that urban knitting has received a lot of positive attention within international discourses, in contrast to many forms of street art, which struggle to gain legitimacy (Hahner & Varda, 2014).

This article posits that the political value of this movement goes beyond the traditional characteristics of the political orthodoxy of social and political movements and contrasts with the main components of alternative political organizations. What makes it unique in the landscape of current social movements is not only the main values that it advocates—among them beauty, solidarity, and consolation—but also the strategy it employs to obtain them—a fierce and active peace. It is perhaps worthwhile describing how the urban knitting movement explicates itself in practice. A particular question that this article addresses and discusses is as follows: Can urban knitting be considered a social and political movement when it does not display many features that are typical of current social movements, such as established leadership and hierarchical organization, development of a shared normative orientation, elaboration of a political program, formation of some kind of collective political identity, outlining of political tactics and strategies of intervention, and so on (Blumer, 1951; James & van Seeters, 2014)?

Given that it is possible to gain insights into the nature of a social movement only by comparing it with others, this research compares the characteristics of this movement with those of others. For an even deeper exploration of the movement, it combines reflections on these political aspects with an illustration of a specific initiative of urban knitting, which is analyzed with the aim of verifying whether it exhibits the political features identified as being typical of the urban knitting movement. The case study reported on here concerns
"Mettiamoci una pezza" (in English, "Let's patch it!"), an initiative that took place in L'Aquila, Italy, 3 years after the 2009 earthquake. Its purpose was to add color and warmth to the devastated city center and draw public attention to its still pitiful state.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, it explores the different dimensions that converge in urban knitting. Second, it introduces "Mettiamoci una pezza" and sets out the aims and methods adopted to explore this initiative. Next, it describes and discusses the main findings to emerge from the case study by simultaneously outlining the main features of urban knitting as a social movement and comparing it with other social movements. Finally, conclusions are drawn, some reflections are offered on urban knitting's political originality, and the contributions and limitations of this research are reviewed.

The Features of Urban Knitting

The movement of urban knitting is characterized by considerable complexity because it incorporates a number of dimensions. In contrast with traditional social movements, which usually refer to a single political tradition (Fuster Morell, 2012; Gordon, 1986; Wieviorka, 2005), urban knitting merges and reworks at least five different traditions and dimensions: (1) activism, (2) domesticity, (3) handicraft, (4) art, and (5) feminism. Compared with these authors' previous work (Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015), in this article, the framework of the traditions merging in urban knitting has been perfected through the addition of the fifth tradition: feminism. Of course, these five dimensions, as frequently happens, are not mutually exclusive but rather closely interconnected, with overlapping areas. This is not a limitation, as it is precisely from the fusion of the five different traditions that this hybridized movement derives its originality. However,

constructing a taxonomy is still important because this enables scholars to better understand the cultural and political layers of this movement.

This discussion begins with the first aspect of urban knitting, activism. Springgay (2010) coined the neologism knitivism to refer to a specific form of craftivism (Greer, 2007) that pairs knitting with activism and deploys traditional handicrafts and fiber arts as media to advance social and political causes and promote positive change. In doing so, activists exploit the stereotypes that underlie the assumed "innocence" of knitted artwork and use viewers' familiarity with, and the gentleness of, craft art such as knitting, crocheting, and sewing, to engage in protests that unite people—first and foremost women—around the world (Chidgey, 2009; Hermanson, 2012; Myzelev, 2009). As Greer (2014) highlighted, "the creation of things by hand leads to a better understanding of democracy, because it reminds us that we have power" (p. 8). Actually, the use of craft and fiber arts for political and social causes is not new (Jackson, 2009; Obniski, 2008). For example, in 1765, colonial women decided to knit their clothes in order to boycott English goods and resist higher taxation on everyday items as a consequence of the Stamp Act, thereby attributing potentially political implications to their domestic pursuits (Ruland, 2010; Thatcher Ulrich, 2002). In the 1860s, William Morris, a well-known textile designer in the United Kingdom, gave birth to the Arts and Crafts movement in order to encourage a reappraisal of handcraftsmanship and precapitalist forms of culture and society in opposition to the industrial revolution (Naylor, 1971; Parry, 2005). Another example can be found in the pre-Civil War American South, when African American slaves used quilting to communicate messages and escape routes along the Underground Railroad, which was a route through the United States and Canada. It appears that the patterns in the quilts did in fact contain secret messages that helped direct slaves to freedom (Fry, 1990; Tobin & Dobard, 2000). In more recent times, the Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, saw thousands of women wearing knitted pink caps with cat ears, called "pussyhats," to manifest their anger against Trump's statements about women, minorities, and the disabled (Bain, 2017). According to Groeneveld (2016), the softness of the fibers, which characterizes urban knitting protests, counteracts any possibly violent response to the activists by the police.

Regarding the second dimension of urban knitting, domesticity, it is not surprising to discover that here, unlike in other movements, women are the main protagonists (Turney, 2009). Historically, domestic craft activities, such as knitting, crocheting, embroidery, and sewing, were considered a necessary and integral part of housework. Even if these days knitting is seen as a domestic task carried out mainly by women, for most of history, it was a craft practiced primarily by men. In fact, knitting is thought to have its origins in the Middle East in pre-Christian times, and it may have derived from the knot work that seafarers used to create fishing nets (Burnham, 1972; Rutt, 1987). Even Lucretius (2007) in De Rerum Natura writes that nature forced men rather than women to spin wool because men were more adept in this art. The Middle Ages saw the creation of knitting guilds, which were men-only labor unions with structured apprenticeship systems that supported male knitters who worked professionally to provide knitted fabric and garments for sale (Bucior, 2013). According to Macdonald (1990), it was only after the industrial revolution, as men took on jobs working with machines, that knitting was taken up as a domestic activity performed mainly by women and passed down from mothers to daughters (Scott & Keates, 2004). Women became responsible for the production of domestic goods, such as clothing for family members, quilts, blankets, pillow covers, and so on. However, there is also some evidence of

American and British boys in schools knitting socks, blankets, and scarves for troops during the Second World War (Bucior, 2013). Even after World War II, there were and are other circumstances in which men have engaged in knitting, such as during military service or when in jail (Christiansen, 2006; Gallas, 2013). Although tough men have knitted over the centuries, the current and enduring association with knitting is women. In more recent times, males represent only a small number of knitters, and for this reason, knitting is perceived as a gender-specific activity (Gilligan, 2013; Myzelev, 2009).

In the second half of the last century and in particular during the 1980s, the popularity of domestic craft activities showed a sharp decline in the Western world. Craft increasingly lost its role in the domestic economy of families, squeezed between the intense pace of domestic and external work. This decline was due to several factors, including increasing awareness on the part of women that their domestic labor was not valued socially, leading to their increasing refusal to do it, and the parallel, growing availability of low-cost machine knitted items. Today, the Western world is witnessing the resurgence of knitting. However, it no longer has a grandmotherly image because it has been transformed into a subversive tool deployed for political and social purposes. This transformation implies the transfer of the domestic sphere into the political and public dimension and the development of a new relationship between women, space, and knitting, based mainly on the application to the city of the same care strategies they apply inside the home.

The third dimension that converges in the urban knitting movement is that of handicraft. The current resurrection of knitting has grown out of the larger rediscovery of traditional handicrafts and more generally of DIY practices, which include not only knitting but also activities such as canning, making homemade clothes, and so forth (Gauntlett, 2011; Levine & Heimerl, 2008). These practices often originate in dissatisfaction with the current economic system and represent for crafters an act of critical opposition against big corporations and mass consumer culture, as well as an autarchic desire to be self-sufficient (Chansky, 2010; Orton-Johnson, 2014). Although DIY culture originated in a nondigital world, it is worth pointing out that in the last decade, a substantial boost to the spread of DIY activity has been provided by the Internet; through blogs, forums, social media, video tutorials, and so forth, it has empowered this subculture, favoring and supporting a more rapid sharing of ideas, tips, and projects (Steed, 2016). Thanks to these online platforms and apps, more and more people are learning the skills to make things, turning themselves into active creators instead of mere consumers. This phenomenon affects every sector, from pickling vegetables to making jams or baking a cake, and more recently extends to the construction of fab labs and the Makers movement (Anderson, 2014; Hatch, 2013; Kwon & Lee, 2017), as well as the growth of activities such as building robots and prototyping and manufacturing new products by using devices such as 3D printers and laser cutters. The numerous DIY websites represent not only a useful space to learn and find resources, tutorials, and ideas but also an important community building environment that supports the development of so-called "relational creativity", the involvement of community members in meaningful actions or projects, mobilization for group activities, and, more in general, online and offline interactions (Humphreys, 2008).

The fourth dimension that converges in this movement is art. In urban knitting, at least two artistic traditions can be recognized: that of fiber art and that of street art (Haveri, 2016). The first focuses on materials such as natural or synthetic fiber and

uses knitting, weaving, and crocheting as work techniques. The American feminist movement of the 1960s recognized the grounds for a new art language in this practice. In the late 1970s, the fiber art movement emerged thanks to a series of women artists who demonstrated that they could also make art with materials belonging to women's domestic traditions (Auther, 2008; Baizerman, 2004; Mildred & Larsen, 1972). The idea of using these kinds of materials has also given rise to other artistic practices that involve, for example, materials connected with cooking and used to create sweet sculptures.

The second artistic tradition that emerges here is street art. Street art is usually done in a performative way and is site specific (Blanche` , 2015). The material existence of the city is essential to the significance of a specific artwork (Riggle, 2010). Another crucial aspect of street art's nature is the subversiveness, whereby street artworks are able to transform a corner of a city into contested ground. In doing so, they establish a specific and meaningful relationship with the place and, at the same time, disrupt and temporarily redescribe everyday common uses of the public space, engaging with social, economic, political, and legal aspects of the urban context (Baldini, 2016). Several scholars have already discussed street art in terms of subcultural activities and interpreted it as a way for marginalized groups to assert their presence while reclaiming their piece of the city (Ferrell, 1996; Macdonald, 2001). In the case of textile graffiti, the urban context not only contributes to the significance of the artwork, it also transforms the meaning of knitting, making it different from its original definition. From being an activity belonging to housework and family members, it has become a social activity carried out in public and in interaction with the city (Price, 2015). Like many other forms of public art (understood as art received within a public sphere), urban knitting possesses the essential value of encouraging grassroots and inclusive political participation and promoting citizenship engagement. In this sense, the public context within which the knitting installations are performed and received plays a pivotal role, given that the meanings of the artistic interventions depend on the specific local setting and are negotiated socially and politically (Baldini & Pietrucci, 2017). Furthermore, the online dimension also plays a fundamental role in spreading an artwork around the world and documenting its existence—something that is crucial, given that the ephemeral and temporary nature that characterizes street art also means that it is easily removed or destroyed by the weather (Honig & MacDowall, 2016).

The fifth dimension that flows into the urban knitting movement is feminism. Indeed, it is thanks to the first and the second waves of feminism that the metamorphosis of this traditionally female activity into a tool of political expression and insubordination has been able to take place (Myzelev, 2015; Pentney, 2008). In third-wave feminism, which is greatly indebted to first and second wave, the originality of the urban knitting movement has expressed and revealed itself with respect to other social and political moments. In fact, it has gone to the heart of women's traditions by creating a kind of continuity while at the same time changing its meaning (Groeneveld, 2010; Minahan & Cox, 2007; Parker, 1984). The use of popular culture for feminist ends represents one of the unique aspects of third-wave feminism, which adopts it to expand what counts as political and modes of political activism (Scholz, 2010). By reclaiming and making the domestic a source of pride, women have the opportunity to redefine their practices culturally as acts of innovation instead of regression. In this sense, needled works are used as feminist expression, as a way to reclaim several aspects of traditional femininity in powerful new ways, subverting gender normative expectations.

As Bartlett and Henderson (2013) suggest, it is the remaking of meaning and context that makes an object feminist. In this regard, Chansky points out:

> [W]omen are returning to domestic arts such as knitting and quilting with a sense of strength, not servitude, viewing the needle as a means of creative outlet that communicates their individual strength. Many women see this current textile revolution as the actualization of personal choice that Second-Wave feminists fought so hard for. (2010, p. 681).

Contemporary knitting no longer aspires to creating items of unrecognized domestic value but to producing political organization (Hackney, 2015; Jørgensen, 2008). The current resurgence in its popularity can be interpreted as a reclamation of women's domestic skills and a way to fuse creativity with politics, providing opportunities for strengthening community ties. Obviously, not all of contemporary knitting has a political or subversive value, and it is possible to identify several degrees in which knitters engage—explicitly or implicitly—with feminist politics (Kelly, 2014). Moreover, the fact that urban knitting installations are often applauded, according to some scholars, by the mainstream media as "innocent," "inoffensive," "feminine," "warm," and "pleasing" has two connotations. On one hand, this magnifies the positive features of the yarn craft; on the other hand, it risks functioning "as conservating gendered logic" and weakening and debunking the political significance of this practice (Hahner & Varda, 2014, p. 6).

In the present authors' perspective, the phenomenon of urban knitting overturns the meaning of domesticity, which is ultimately shaped by the antiwoman elements of the housewife figure that were crucial for Taylorism and postTaylorism (Dalla Costa & James, 1972; Fortunati, 1981). According to Pentney (2008), it represents a way to disrupt the normalization of capitalism, globalization, war, and antiabortion politics in contemporary society and an opportunity to reclaim a devalued feminine craft. This reclamation uses traditional means of artistic expression to intervene in current political issues in innovative ways, characterized by visual force (Chansky, 2010).

In developing the urban knitting movement as a global movement, women activists have had to leave the house, intervene in public affairs, and talk and act in public spaces. All of these efforts are directed at reconnecting this movement to feminist practices, redefining women's social identity, negotiating new social roles for women, and building a new power of influence over the management of cities (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Fields, 2014).

The Case Study of "Mettiamoci Una Pezza": Aims and Methods

This section presents the case study of "Mettiamoci una pezza," with the purpose of exploring the main features demonstrated by this initiative. A description of the social and political characteristics of this initiative is given and discussed in light of the features displayed by the urban knitting movement at the international level. This section also compares the features of this initiative with those of initiatives promoted by other social movements.

On April 6, 2009, a devastating earthquake struck L'Aquila, a small city located approximately 85km northeast of Rome. It was Italy's worst natural disaster of recent times, killing more than 300 people and leaving around 65,000 homeless. The damage to the city and surrounding area was extensive: Many houses were damaged, and some collapsed. Much of the historic center, the social and political heart of L'Aquila, was

heavily damaged, and, for safety reasons, immediately after the earthquake, it was turned into a ''red zone'' and closed, with numerous barricades blocking citizen access.

With an estimated 11,000 buildings needing reconstruction, the question of what could be the future for such a place quickly arose. Fearing that their city might become a latter-day Pompeii, the locals, showing extraordinary resilience, staged numerous sit-ins and cross-partisan forms of activism to raise awareness of the serious situation that persisted in L'Aquila several years after the disaster and galvanize the government into taking action to rebuild the city as it was before (Farinosi & Trere´, 2010, 2014).

One of the numerous protests organized by the people of the city postearthquake was called ''Mettiamoci una pezza.'' The initiative was organized at the end of February 2012 by a group of five actresses from Animammersa, a local acting company. Prompted by the fact that, 3 years after the earthquake, the reconstruction process of the historic center had not yet started, they decided to organize an urban knitting initiative as a medium for raising awareness about the condition of the city and alerting the public to the degradation and decay of the historical center. The initiative took place on April 6, 2012, exactly 3 years after the earthquake.

Over time, in order to analyze ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' and grasp its complexities, this research adopted a multimethod approach based on a combination of different strategies for collecting data (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). The strong point of this approach is that, thanks to the numerous and heterogeneous kinds of information provided, it contributes to gaining a more complete view of a social phenomenon and advancing scholarly knowledge about it. To this end, the present authors collected data from nonparticipant observations of the online dimension, conducted a content analysis of online content generated and shared by the activists, and performed an offline ethnographic analysis of the event. Table 1 summarizes all of the data analyzed and published so far, to which has been added a last line regarding a new corpus of data to be presented in this article (see Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015).

As part of this research, five face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted with the local organizers of the initiative, all of whom were women aged between 46 and 54, and all of whom belonged to Animammersa. It was not possible to conduct these interviews earlier because, for political and professional reasons, these women were difficult to reach. The data collected represent the last missing piece rounding off the present exploration of this initiative, allowing a deeper understanding of the political vision and features of ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' and its underlying dynamics that could not be explored through the research methods used previously. Nevertheless, the findings that emerged from the other methods adopted earlier provided an inside view and indepth knowledge of the topic, necessary for developing relevant and meaningful questions for the interviews. Thus, the main benefit derived from having adopted different methods of research to analyze a single social phenomenon lies in their ''complementarity'' (see Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), or, in other words, in the possibility of using and intertwining clarifications, illustrations, and interpretations of the findings that emerge from one method with those emerging from the other methods. The interviews with the local organizers provided a clearer view of the different aspects of this creative and peaceful form of protest.

Table 1. A Summary of the Various Analyses Conducted for the Case Study of ''Mettiamoci Una Pezza.''

Method adopted	Analysis conducted
Virtual ethnography	Six months of online, nonparticipant observation to explore how activists use different social platforms (i.e., blogs and social media pages) and for what purposes
Content analysis of online materials Produced by the activists	Analysis of: – all posts (N¼ 34) published on the blog of the initiative (https://mettiamociunapezza.wordpress.com), from February to April 2012 – status updates, comments, interactions, pictures, and linksshared on the Facebook page of ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' and photos uploaded to the official Flickr account for the event, from February to April 2012 – the overall textual content written on five personal blogs and four online knitting groups that spontaneously participated in the promotion of the initiative and helped to spread the call for action
Participant observation of the event	Observation and collection (including through interviews) of the reactions of participants and visitors to the installation during the event in L'Aquila on April 6, 2012
Semistructured interviews	Face-to-face semistructured interviews with the five local organizers of the ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' initiative

In particular, it was possible to explore issues that had not previously been apparent, such as those relating to the political motivations behind ''Mettiamoci una pezza,'' the participation of activists scattered throughout the world, the role played by the media, and so on.

Kvale (1983) defines the interview as a research tool ''whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena'' (p. 174). In particular, face to face interviews is characterized by synchronous communication in time and space and by a greater spontaneity in the interviewee's answers. In order to conduct the semi structured interviews, an interview guide was developed based on a sequence of questions and a series of topics that needed to be covered during the conversations. This guide aided in tailoring the questions and gathering rich, focused qualitative textual data on the personal experiences of the participants.

The interviews took place in a bar in the center of L'Aquila, and their length ranged from 40 to 70 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and later transcribed verbatim. The resulting texts were analyzed in accordance with Flick's (1998) method of thematic coding, which aims to establish a framework of thematic ideas about a text and to find common patterns across a data set. Coding is a way of indexing a text and has a central role in qualitative analysis because, through the systematic classification of themes, it helps to define what the data are about. It involves identifying several passages of the text that are about the same idea and then linking them under a label—the code. As Gibbs (2007) explains, ''codes form a focus for thinking about the text and its interpretation'' (p. 40). The

definition of thematic categories was mostly developed from the texts (''data driven'') but was also received from findings collected previously through the other methods and, more in general, from the literature (''theory driven''). To code and analyze the interview transcripts, NVivo, a dedicated software for computer-assisted qualitative analysis (CAQDAS), was used, which facilitated the management of the data collected, its organization in a structured way, and its examination. This methodological approach permitted the investigation of the phenomenon of urban knitting directly from the organizers' points of view and determination of the most relevant categories that would reflect their perspectives on the political values and impact of their initiative. Furthermore, it assisted in grasping their motivations, goals, and ideals (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Vettehen, Renckstorf, & Wester, 1996).

Main Findings from the Interviews

Interviews of the local organizers of ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' made it possible to illustrate, in more detail and from another perspective, the main practices through which the urban knitting movement expressed itself in this specific instance.

According to the literature, the urban knitting movement is generally characterized by (1) an emphasis on doing, (2) the roles of creative citizens as interventionists and makers, and (3) the use of digital media and social platforms for information sharing and protest coordination, in combination with the use of the old medium of postal mail (Meissner & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Winge & Stalp, 2013). However, this movement also displays innovative aspects and political peculiarities that this discussion traces, starting with an analysis of the political features of ''Mettiamoci una pezza.'' The following five main political hallmarks emerged from the analysis.

A High Rate of Participation by Women

Generally, the first distinctive hallmark attributed to the urban knitting movement is that it primarily involves women (Hermanson, 2012; Minahan & Cox, 2007). ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' is no exception. The data highlight the current reclamation of the domestic and how a traditional craft, knitting, has been transformed from an instrument of regression to one of innovation. Meshing feminism with needlework, activists had the opportunity to redefine the handmade culturally, giving it a new meaning. According to Donatella, one of the local organizers, the most relevant contribution came from women's online communities. Some of these communities specifically focused on the topic of knitting, such as PatchworkCaffe` and SocialCrochet, while others were based on other kinds of domestic activities, such as cooking or gardening. All of them contributed to the initiative, not only by sending knitted pieces but also by disseminating the call for action online. More than 5,000 knitted squares were sent to Animammersa. Unexpectedly, there was also a high level of participation by men, as highlighted by Patrizia in her following statement:

> Most of the yarn activists are women, but there are also many men. Let's say 60% vs. 40% [...]. The percentage of men is rather high. Their interest is not so much in making the patches, but about the spectacular effect produced by the final installation. They are not very young of course, aged 25 years and over, fans of street art...

This recalls, on one hand, the large male presence in the domain of street art and, on the other, memory of a distant past when men used to knit (Bucior, 2013; Lucretius, 2007; Macdonald, 1990). Furthermore, in addition to men, the initiative also saw the

spontaneous involvement of children, particularly during the final installation of the knitted pieces in the cathedral square. They perceived that moment as a sort of party, involving people of all ages and genders in a playful and fun time.

> Passers-by there, sometimes acquaintances, other times strangers, friends of friends, men, women, children, kids helped us to sew the patches. Their participation in our initiative was spontaneous. [...]. Those who agreed with our idea participated. That's all! (Donatella)

While in many social movements, and in politics generally, women participate as a minority (Merz, 2014), in the urban knitting movement, the opposite is true: As was the case in L'Aquila, women take the initiative, design the way in which the movement is established, and develop its content and strategies. Surprisingly, however, recent times have seen increasing numbers of men turning to this craft and taking part in the movement, thereby reducing the gender imbalance among participants.

Involvement of Activists of Every Generation from All Over the World

The second hallmark of the urban knitting movement, which can also be seen in "Mettiamoci una pezza," is that urban knitting involves members of every generation: from children to the elderly (Levine & Heimerl, 2008). Generally, other current movements are mainly made up of young people and adults (Einwohner, Hollander, & Olson, 2000; Klandermans, 1993; Whittier, 1997), and they have difficulty attracting children and elderly women. In contrast, the urban knitting movement is markedly transgenerational and involves children, teens, adults, and elders, including males and females (Bal, Nolan, & Seko, 2014; Haveri, 2016; Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015). In addition, it became clear that this initiative, like the urban knitting movement itself—which is a truly global movement (Greer, 2014)—also involved people from all around the world. The interviews with its organizers revealed some interesting data about the geographical origins of the activists and the knitted squares. "People from L'Aquila created only around 200 of the 5,000 pieces received, while the rest arrived from other parts of Italy and more than 1,000 from abroad, accompanied by numerous messages of solidarity" (Donatella).

Overall, the literature on the urban knitting movement asserts that the movement is a global entity, in that it typically involves the simultaneous contributions of thousands of activists, from across the world, to initiatives taking place thousands of kilometers from where they live (Haveri, 2016; Meissner & Fitzpatrick, 2017). Thus, the urban knitting movement is made up of multiethnic, multilinguistic, and multicultural activists and sympathizers living all over the world and knitting their pieces in order to help activities in other countries to flourish.

Other movements are global in a different way, in the sense that an action carried out in one place is then viewed around the world and replicated in other places by local activists (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Take, for example, the case of the Occupy movement, where criticism of the financial system spread and was taken up by activists in other places who had been inspired by the first demonstration in New York City (Agarwal et al., 2014; Penney & Dadas, 2013; Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012). The global character of the knitting movement is innovative because it represents one of the first solid examples of a political network that has developed globally. Compare this with socialism and communism, neither of which has been able to resolve this problem and become a true international political organization (Pons, 2014; Silber, 1994; Vaubel, 1986). This

"miracle" of globalism has been possible thanks to the combination of old (postal mail) and new media (Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015), such as the Internet and the smartphone. This is another aspect of the originality of this movement, which positions itself as "post-digital" (Ludovico, 2012).

Yarn as a Medium of Political Protest

The third feature of this event, and all the initiatives organized by the urban knitting movement, is that the political action uses pieces of fiber in place of words.

The local organizers of "Mettiamoci una pezza" said that they decided to use urban knitting as a medium of protest because they wanted to create something impressive, able to attract public attention to the post-earthquake condition of L'Aquila, but in an unusual way. Baldini and Petrucci (2017) have interpreted this spontaneous initiative as a "public modality of citizenship engagement" (p. 118) whose main objectives were to challenge dominant paradigms at the basis of the reconstruction process of L'Aquila and carve out a space for political discussion. As Patrizia explained:

> The situation of L'Aquila was dramatic, but the national media did not talk about it anymore. This was not bearable! We must regain a space in the national agenda by doing something sensational...[W]e did not want to use bombs because we are quiet women [laughs] so the idea of yarn bombing sounded great!

Using knitted patches, they aimed to bring attention to certain elements that characterized the post-earthquake configuration of the cathedral square, such as the big tent set up by the Civil Protection department, the numerous barricades, and the scaffolding supporting historic buildings. As Donatella explained:

> We used the patches as though they were markers that were going [...] to illuminate the things that we did not like [...] to say: "This barricade should not stay here anymore because citizens should once again have a place to meet, like before the earthquake!"

The peaceful use of pieces of fiber in place of words is not the only difference between this movement and traditional ones. What also sets it apart is the internal organization of the movement and the issue of its leadership. What emerged from the interviews was that in L'Aquila there had been a "decisionmaking core" rather than a leadership as such. This core included the five actresses, who made the most important decisions and coordinated all the phases of the initiative, while at the same time, as they explained, being open to proposals and suggestions from other activists, as clearly indicated in this statement from Donatella:

> As often happens in the home when you find the solution without having puzzled too much, all the decisions were taken collectively. There has never been a leader in the strict sense of one who wanted to rule over others, but there has always been great respect for the proposals of others [...]. When we went to Cathedral Square each one of us put forward proposals: "Can we put this patch around the tree? Maybe? Yes? No? Let's do it!"

The alleged lack of leadership, which does not mean the lack of organization, is a feature that inevitably calls to mind the history of numerous feminist groups, especially in the United States' women's liberation movement, that, according to historical analysis, worked in a leaderless way and refused any structure. Echols (1989), for example,

describing and discussing radical feminism in America from its beginning in 1967 to its decline in 1975, explains that the East Coast groups aimed to avoid reproducing ''macho leadership'' and tried to achieve egalitarianism by eschewing formal structure. Even Rosen (2000), depicting the ''longest revolution'' and analyzing how the modern women's movement changed America and subverted authority, explains that the 1960's activists rejected authority, feared hierarchies, and criticized the elitist leadership of New Left men. For these reasons, they decided to act differently and to create a truly egalitarian and democratic movement.

By contrast, Jo Freeman, a political scientist and feminist within the movement, points out that the idea of structurelessness does not work, even if it constitutes an intrinsic part of women's liberation ideology. She writes,

> Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible; it may vary over time; it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities, or intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals, with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds makes this inevitable. (Freeman, 1972).

In ''Mettiamoci una pezza,'' the local organizers can be perceived not as leaders in the strict sense of the term, but rather as promoters of this political initiative. This means that among them it is not possible to identify the figure of a leader, understood in a hierarchical and authoritarian sense, but it is possible to determine the presence of an egalitarian structure, composed of a small group of women who were crucial to spreading the initiative all around the world and getting others to take action toward a common goal. These women were flexible and welcomed input rather than being doctrinaire and rigid, representing a good example of a feminist way to explore political organization in terms of an open, warm, and welcoming organization.

The way in which ''Mettiamoci una pezza'' was organized is symptomatic of the fact that the political program of the urban knitting movement does not aim to propose a new model for future society, nor do its activists argue about different political programs. Generally, as Gergen and Gergen (2004) write, militant ideas divide people. Ideas about how to imagine and realize a new and different society always lead to schisms, divisions, and the proliferation of political parties, movements, and organizations. Furthermore, given that ideas are the basis on which any model for a future society is built, people who are more capable of defending their ideas are more likely to be persuasive and charismatic and to become leaders. The organizational dynamics of social and political movements always see the rise of a hierarchy of militants and leaders, or cadres (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001; Morris & Staggenbrog, 2004).

In the urban knitting movement, as with ''Mettiamoci una pezza,'' there is no hierarchy, and none of the problems commonly associated with militants and leaders are evident. What circulates around the world are the ''pieces of fiber,'' which represent the message and the contribution of activists to a specific activity in a city. Continuing the comparison between urban knitting and the Occupy movement, both are urban movements in that they identify cities as the stages on which to perform public demonstrations. However, occupy activists march in the streets and temporarily occupy urban spaces en masse, making a strong and visible show of their dispute with public

institutions (Langman, 2013; Sassen, 2015). Knitters instead use their houses, cafe´ s, or clubs in which to produce pieces of fiber that represent their activism, and they use the postal system to send them around the world to the organizers of local initiatives, who in turn use them to dress a part of the city secretly during the night. Occupy activists make their voices, slogans, and shouts heard above the noise of street traffic (Hammond, 2013; Murray, 2016); urban knitting activists do not raise their voices but make their installations speak for them instead. The Occupy movement has the strength of a political counterprogram (Jensen & Bang, 2013; Rojo, 2014), while urban knitting has the strength of caring and improving upon what already exists.

The Online Sphere as the Place for Public Debate and Coordination

The fourth feature of "Mettiamoci una pezza" is that the place of public debate and coordination was provided by the Internet. From the beginning, the local organizers used digital media to give their initiative visibility and coordinate the protest (see Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015). Specifically, two tools proved to be useful: the blog about the project1 and the related page on the Facebook platform.2 The organizers used them intensively before, during, and after the installation. Beginning in the month of February, they started to post entries, links, and pictures about other similar urban knitting interventions to explain to the public what they had in mind and give them a general idea of how the installation would come out. In the first phase, through the blog, they launched the call for action all over the world, specifying the characteristics of the type of work required of the knitters and the dimensions of the patches. As part of that call, Animammersa showed people the actual post earthquake situation of the city and asked them to support their motives for protest. All the granny squares received were then photographed and shared online to document the whole collection and create a digital archive containing all the donations. Furthermore, the Internet also proved to be useful after the installation, when the organizers and several local activists used it to report about the initiative and share their content online (photos of the installations, comments, reactions, etc.).

Awareness of urban knitting events that had taken place in other parts of the world and had been publicized online was also a key source of inspiration for the local organizers. Online photo-sharing platforms (i.e., Pinterest, Instagram, and Flickr) proved to be useful resources in terms of clarifying how to create the installation in L'Aquila. As Patrizia explained:

> Before organizing "Mettiamoci una pezza" I had consulted as many sites and sources of urban knitting as possible. I began to request information and details, to contact activists from other parts of the world. [...] For example, when I saw the picture of an entire facade covered, I left a comment under the picture asking "How did you do this?" and found out that they had used glue! If it was not for social media, these contacts would never have been possible!

On the whole, as has already been explained, social media were crucial for connecting activists from various parts of the world. However, the project also required a lot of work in terms of relationships and communication. To give an idea of the amount of effort it entailed, Donatella told us that from January to April 2012 she worked online around 8 hours per day: "There were continuous requests for information from those who wanted to send knitted squares; there were associations that contacted us repeatedly...I never counted how many emails we managed!".

In contrast to the more traditional social movements that need, as mentioned, specific places in cities as physical sites for organization and debate, the urban knitting movement has a consistent place of debate and coordination in the online space (Orton-Johnson, 2014). The Internet played a fundamental role in spreading "Mettiamoci una pezza's" call for action worldwide. Nevertheless, as its organizers explained, there was effectively no relationship between them and other groups of activists scattered around the world. The only direct contact consisted of a request, albeit enthusiastically received, to post and spread the call for action on Facebook pages and websites.

Today, the ability to use the Internet and mobile phones, seen as important organizational and communicative tools for political action, has changed the way activists stay in touch, debate, and coordinate social action. The Internet has, in effect, extended the physical public space in which individuals can interact with one another and share their opinions and experiences (Garrett, 2006; Rheingold, 2003; Shirky, 2008). The intensive use of social media platforms by activists demonstrates that the online dimension is no longer something detached from physical reality but offers citizens new environments for social mobilization and sociopolitical demands (Khondker, 2011; Farinosi & Trere´, 2010; Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015). This has changed the rituals of political activity, as well; being engaged in politics today means fewer opportunities to participate in politics together, in copresence. Furthermore, as networked activists are virtually connecting with many people around the world, it seems that offline forms, such as the streets and squares of cities, are losing their social and political meanings as artefacts for everyday political practices—even if the continuous resurgence of social movements around the world tends to reappropriate the urban space as the place of protest and mobilization. Not only the urban knitting movement but also many other contemporary movements, such as, for example, the Arab Spring, despite being heavily based on the Internet, reevaluate physical copresence and on-site interactions and reassign great importance to urban spaces (Hahner & Varda, 2014; Hofmann, Mehren, & Uphues, 2012; McAuliffe, 2012). Indeed, the urban knitting movement establishes a specific relationship with the urban environment precisely because it aims to improve the quality of urban life in degraded and abandoned places. For this reason, studying the mechanisms of online participation alongside offline practices is pivotal to understanding urban knitting activism and the role of digital and analog devices.

Capacity to Create Empathy with Both Local Authorities and Mainstream Media

Finally, the fifth feature of the "Mettiamoci una pezza" initiative, which is also apparent in several other urban knitting initiatives, is the capacity to create empathy toward it. The relationship between "Mettiamoci una pezza" and the local authorities was curious. In contrast with those involved in other worldwide yarn-bombing actions, the L'Aquila city authorities contacted its organizers as soon as they heard about the initiative and asked to be involved. Given the grassroots nature of the initiative, this proposal led to extensive discussions within the group. In the end, and especially for safety reasons, they decided to accept the municipality's patronage. This made it possible for them to access the historical city center, which, as has been explained, was forbidden to ordinary citizens after the earthquake. In this way, "Mettiamoci una pezza" turned into a sort of "authorized illegal initiative," allowing it to avoid two potentially dangerous violations: (1) entry into the red zone and (2) erecting textile graffiti in public spaces.

In the case of the relationship between "Mettiamoci una pezza" and the mainstream media, the situation was slightly different. Although at the international level, it has been noticed that between media and social movements there is an

interdependency as they need each other (Dow, 2014), this case study tells a different story. In particular, at the beginning, neither the local nor the national media showed much interest in the initiative, which struggled to catch media attention. As the organizers described, on the day of their press conference to announce "Mettiamoci una pezza," there were no journalists in the room. Refusing to lose heart, the organizers decided to hold the press conference anyway and to record it and upload the video on their website. As Donatella pointed out:

> We expected at least local journalists, but they did not come. Therefore, we decided to record the press conference and share the video online. Thus, came the first contacts...TG3 and other TV channels, such as TV2000...recently we were also interviewed by a journalist from Swiss TV.

This conflicting relationship with the media changed after the yarn bombing in Duomo square, which all the main national TV channels covered. This marked a great success for the local organizers because it meant that "Mettiamoci una pezza" had achieved its goal of bringing the postearthquake situation of L'Aquila back under the spotlight.

The major Italian television channels spoke of our collective action...TG5, Rete 4, RAI 1, RAI 2, twice on TG3...we captured the attention of all of them, locally and nationally...Journalists liked the idea of the initiative, the originality of its form, because in the end it was a peaceful protest [...] and it also gave them the chance to put out a pleasant and artistic news story...not too politically engaged! (Donatella)

The capacity of this initiative to engender the empathy of various public authorities, who in principle should have been against illegal means of protest, is perfectly in line with what often happens worldwide with the urban knitting movement (among the others, see, e.g., the cases of Leicester Police and Manchester City Council reported in Hahner & Varda, 2014). In contrast with traditional graffiti art, which provokes disapproval from citizens and local institutions alike, urban knitting has a peculiar relationship with the urban environment. Like those in many other social movements, graffiti artists and activists use the city in an instrumental way to amplify their presence and messages in the place where power is exercised. By contrast, knitters have a specific relationship with the urban space because their aim is to improve the quality of urban life in general. This creates empathy and solidarity (Hahner & Varda, 2014). Other ways in which they evoke empathy include the following: first, the fact that urban knitters adopt a gentle manner; second, the fact that their initiatives always have positive connotations; third, the capacity to fit well with news values, yielding good and colorful pictures for effective TV coverage (Dow, 2014); and fourth, the fact that they handle social rituals in a nonaggressive way, in the sense that while traditional political demonstrations change the meaning of streets, squares, shops, banks, and universities, knitters further beautify and improve these urban spaces. To understand this, point properly, ritual theory (Collins, 2004) and performance theory can be useful (Butler, 2015; Schechner, 1988). Collins (2004) aids in understanding that many forms of interaction ritual cross the public space, as people inscribe into specific daily routines the ways in which they interact in the public space. However, it is the concept of emotional energy, in particular, that facilitates an understanding of why the "Mettiamoci una pezza" initiative, with its original approach to the urban environment, was able to attract empathy and provide enthusiasm and confidence to its participants. The same empathy toward urban knitting initiatives is also expressed worldwide by a mainstream media that generally treats this movement well (Gitlin, 1980; Price, 2015; Springgay,

2010). In a similar way, performance theory, which posits the importance of public assembly as a pluralized form of performances, can aid in understanding the success of this initiative among activists, sympathizers, and participating citizens; all of these participants understood perfectly that the gathering of their own physical bodies in this public performance was able to say something that goes beyond words.

Discussion and Final Remarks

Two research questions motivated this work: First, how does the urban knitting movement express itself in practice? Second, can it be considered a social and political movement when it does not exhibit many of the features typical of current social movements? From this analysis, it emerges that the hybridization of the five distinct political traditions of craftivism, domesticity, handicraft, art, and feminism, and their convergence within the movement, have contributed to the establishment of urban knitting as an original social movement. Furthermore, the description of its main political features in practice reflects the freshness and the novelty of its political initiatives. Like many other forms of expression of third-wave feminism, the urban knitting movement does not see the need for marches (Chansky, 2010) but aims to achieve social change through sociopolitical cultural actions, instead of through an overtly political agenda (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). Nevertheless, the actions and initiatives are disruptive because they challenge the status quo. In doing so, they represent a cause for reflection (Clarke, 2016) and convey feminist ideas and feelings, even when they do not explicitly discuss feminism (Kelly, 2014). The urban knitting movement, as demonstrated by this case study, was able to redefine the meaning of knitting, transforming this activity from a devalued and traditionally domestic feminine craft into a creative tool of protest and empowerment (Fortunati, 2014; Farinosi & Fortunati, 2015). Of course, the political value of this practice and the related possibilities of knitting as a feminist project are strictly dependent on the specific contexts. The initiative of "Mettiamoci una pezza," for the peculiar features that emerged from this analysis, undoubtedly contributes to a feminist project of social change (Kelly, 2014). As these findings show, the local organizers explicitly envisioned a political intervention that can be labeled as "feminist" due to its specific characteristics. It has been able to mobilize numerous people all around the world, who, through more than 5,000 knitted squares, contributed to raise awareness about the condition of the post-earthquake L'Aquila, demonstrating the subversive potential of knitting and its ability to draw public attention to an initiative aiming to point out the state of degradation and decay of the historical center.

In answer to the second research question, comparison with other background social movements has highlighted urban knitting as both a movement with many innovative characteristics and a fully-fledged part of the feminist movement through its feminist valence. In particular, the initiative examined here, "Mettiamoci una pezza," displays the five features identified as being typical of urban knitting in general.

Moreover, it is worthwhile to highlight that the initiative analyzed is connected to the Italian political context. This means and, at the same time, justifies that there are also some pivotal differences between the findings that emerged from this case study and those found in many of the studies conducted in U.S. contexts. In particular, as Hahner and Varda (2014) argue, the most relevant discrepancy concerns racism and classism, at the basis of the "exceptional treatment" reserved by the U.S. media for urban knitting. These two scholars point out that in the United States, the celebration of this practice is based on White middle- and upper-class norms and tastes, in

opposition to the traditional paint graffiti, which are typically associated with less privileged Black and Brown people and often treated as vandalism and criminal acts.

This study of "Mettiamoci una pezza" has referred to different typologies of qualitative research and to a wide range of different approaches to data collection and analysis. The strength of doing so is that this has allowed the study to do justice to urban knitting by enabling a detailed and deep analysis of the movement. The weak point is that the study could not escape the limitations intrinsic to qualitative analyses, that is, the reliance on a relatively small number of participants, the impossibility of extending the findings to similar initiatives, the lack of statistical significance, and so on (Silverman, 2013). Future research might usefully adopt a quantitative approach, to map systematically the most recent urban knitting initiatives throughout the world and analyze them in light of the five political features that emerged from this analysis.

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Notes

1. https://mettiamociunapezza.wordpress.com/
2. https://www.facebook.com/mettiamociunapezza

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