Negotiations of feminist identity and social relations at a London Women's Centre

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of London
This thesis provides an ethnographic account of a Women's Centre in North London and focuses upon the negotiation of a distinctive feminist community of identity at the Centre, in the context of the women's movement. This account takes issue with the usual classification of Women's Centres as one instance of a range of local manifestations of the women's movement and its implication that their organisation and structure can be inferred from an analysis of the movement.

The thesis is organised in two parts. In the first part, the first chapter addresses methodological issues and argues that the thesis presents material which is not available from the sociology or history of the movement. The following three chapters consist of an analysis of feminism and the women's movement as the context of the Women's Centre. They examine its discursive, social and political dimensions, the different relations of its participants with the political cultures and social groups from which the movement emerged, and the forms and means of communication which structure its different dimensions. Contrary to the commonly held view that the small group is the basic unit of the movement, it is argued that the movement is organized on the basis of social networks.

The second part of the thesis examines the feminist positions and social relations at the Women's Centre in terms of hierarchies of identity and difference. These hierarchies are demonstrated by the analysis of the spatial organization of the Centre and the social positions and life-stories of women using the Centre. The negotiation of identity is pursued in the final chapter in an examination of instrumental negotiations between the Centre and the local government.

It is argued that the mobilisation of a distinctive community of identity at the Centre is achieved through the activation of cross-boundary social networks which extend across the social field of the women's movement and beyond it. The relatively permeable nature of the symbolic boundary of the Women's Centre permits both cross-boundary networks and strategic exclusions which function to accommodate different feminist positions. This accommodation of difference is contrasted with the fragmentation of the movement at a national level.
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INTRODUCTION

The thesis is based on fieldwork carried out during 1977 and 1978 at a Women's Centre at Riley House in the London Borough of Camden. The Women's Centre was used by a variety of groups and the thesis aims to analyse the different relations and practices which characterised the social world of the Women's Centre and constituted a specific community of identification. The Women's Centre is generally referred to throughout the thesis as the Centre. Analysis focuses upon the processes of inclusion and exclusion through which the Centre identity was constructed from the diverse practices, projects and social relations of women participating in the different groups which comprised the Centre. These groups were constantly in process with changing social composition, varying objectives and focuses of interest.

The framing of the Women's Centre as an object of study involves situating it in relation to both feminism and the women's movement and to the local community, which is defined in terms of local government and the organization of social reproduction. The Centre was established by women whose association with each other derived from, or was marked by, their involvement with the women's liberation movement, the specific form in which 'second wave feminism' emerged in Britain in the late nineteen sixties and which was formally established in 1970 (Wandor, 1972; Sebasteyn, 1979; Coote and Campbell, 1982;
Making sense of the Centre in terms of the meanings assigned to it and derived from it by the women using the Centre therefore involves an analysis of the women's liberation movement and the more diffuse women's movement which succeeded and subsumed it.

Women's Centres have been classified and discussed as 'manifestations of the women's movement' in an unproblematic way (Dalerup, 1986, p. 29). In fact there is very little literature on their internal organization and social composition, particularly before the advent of 'municipal socialism' and the introduction of women's committees into local government in the nineteen eighties (Perrigo, 1986; Tobin, 1990). References to participation in Women's Centres and indeed to 'organising a Women's Centre' (Fell, 1984) abound in feminist literature but there is a notable lack of description and analysis.

In the first person testimonies of women's participation in the women's movement which constitute a significant proportion of feminist literature, Women's Centres feature only as a context of particular group meetings or events. The internal organisation of Women's Centres is not addressed as an object of study in histories of contemporary feminism or the women's movement, either: rather these focus upon the structure and processes of the small group (Coote and Campbell, 1982; Bassnett 1986; Dalerup, 1986; Delmar, 1986; Rowbotham, 1989). The relations between Women's Centres
and the women's movement are, therefore, not documented or analysed. The thesis investigates the relations obscured by the interpretation of Women's Centres as unproblematic 'manifestations' of the movement.

While the Centre cannot be regarded as manifestation of a unitary women's movement and still less as an exemplar or microcosm of it, the social relations, cultural practices and informal power structure at the Centre were derived from the organisational forms, social networks and discourses of feminism and the women's movement which were selectively appropriated and continually re-worked at the Centre. These appropriations and transformations underpin the construction of a distinctive feminist community. For this reason, the Centre has to be analysed in the context of feminism and the women's movement, and the discussion of feminist discourses and practices moves from the general to the particular.

In practice relations between the women at the Centre, the women's movement and the wider discursive formation of contemporary feminism were complex and fluid, structured by relationships with other organisations, including local government. These relations functioned as the means for, and as the outcome of, negotiations of identity and difference.

The Centre was used in different ways by different individuals and groups. It was perceived differently by different women and functioned in a variety of ways. The term 'Centre users' is employed in this thesis to refer to
the women who regularly attended meetings at the Centre and who identified to a significant extent with the Centre as a specific feminist community. Centre users are distinguished from 'clients', a term which I adopt for the local women who used the Centre as a source of information and advice, and from other feminists who visited the Centre from time to time. The adoption of the term 'Centre user', rather than a term designating membership of the Centre, is a significant one in that a classification of women using the Centre as 'members' would imply an a priori entity of which membership can be claimed and this is not an appropriate implication.

In this thesis, 'community', is conceptualised as continually in process rather than as an accomplished entity; a nexus of social relations and sets of practices which promote various degrees of collective identification and belonging. On this basis, the Centre community constituted at one level just one among a whole constellation of feminist communities.

At another level, however, it functioned as a distinctive feminist community, organized around a common body of knowledge derived from personal participation. These types of knowledge, may be characterised, in Geerz's term as 'local' knowledge (Geerz, 1983) and distinguished from knowledge common to all feminists and from knowledge shared by participants in the women's movement, which together will be referred to as 'regional knowledge'. The interaction of Centre users and other feminists, their
cross-boundary social networks, the relaying of regional knowledge along the 'chains of gossip' constituted by these networks and their conversion into a distinctive stock of local knowledge at the Centre are central processes in the mobilization of a distinct Centre community.

During the period of fieldwork the Centre was used for weekly meetings of the Women's Therapy group and a socialist feminist discussion group and as an advice and referral service. Consciousness raising groups and self-defence groups also had formerly been accommodated at the Centre. The Centre was organised by the Collective which was composed of women who regularly attended the groups, other women who contributed to the advice service and a core group of four women committed to maintaining the Centre, while also participating in other groups, known as the 'core Collective' in this thesis.

The Centre, while in principle serving all local women, restricted access to regular use of the site to 'feminists' and the activities and relations were organised according to feminist principles around a feminist agenda, although both the principles and agenda were sometimes the subjects of debate. The rationale for acceptable group activities was feminist. 'Acceptable' activities had to be seen as contributing to the general cause of changing the position of women in society and were required to be non-competitive, non-hierarchical and non-aggressive. The Centre as a whole was organized
around the principle of participation rather than representation, with no formal leadership or hierarchy.

Feminists from other organisations frequently visited the Centre to mobilise support for various campaigns, notably the National Abortion Campaign, and Reclaim the Night (which demonstrated against the public harassment of women at night time). Women who regularly attended group meetings at the Centre usually also participated in other feminist groupings and campaigns at both local and national levels. The Centre, therefore, constituted one site within the social field of feminism and the women’s movement with a fluid population of women whose basis for mutual recognition and identification derived from the women’s movement.

Nevertheless, not all women who claimed a feminist identity, nor all those who were generally acknowledged to be feminists, were admitted to the Centre. On occasions when groups were refused regular use of the Centre, its boundaries became clearly demarcated and a distinctive feminist community emerged in relation to the feminist groupings which were constituted as ‘Other’ rather than different and refused access. Such strategic exclusions and the criteria of inclusion mobilised at the Centre are shown to exemplify the negotiation of feminist identity, difference and otherness which is central to the construction of a community of identification. These negotiations provide the main focus for the thesis.

The Centre community is analysed in three ways; i) in
terms of internal relations and 'insider' knowledges and performances; ii) in terms of cross-boundary social relations and communications networks with other feminist groupings and iii) in terms of cross-boundary social networks in the local community outside the Women’s movement and feminist formation. This third set of relations and practices is concentrated upon the negotiations between Centre users and the analysis of the local Council.

The emphasis throughout the thesis is upon the routes taken by Centre users to the Centre and the movement and the reasons which they gave for 'joining'. The focus is upon their social networks rather than the cultural roots of the movement in the counter-cultures and social movements of the nineteen sixties, or the organization of gender relations encountered by the historical generation of women which provided the initiators and activists of Women’s liberation.

This approach varies from that of most historians of the Women’s movement who locate its origins in structural changes and shifts in the social formation which characterised the nineteen sixties, and more specifically, changes in women’s experience of the contradictions between the changing structure of the economy and the changing gender organisation of labour market on the one hand and the residual ideologies of gender on the other (Delmar, 1972, 1986; Rowbotham, 1973, 1989; Freeman, 1979; Bouchier 1983).
Such approaches account for the origins of the movement in terms of the responses of large numbers of women to their changing structural position. They do not in themselves, however, contribute substantially to an explanation of the particular form, practices and relations which characterized the feminist formation in which the Centre was located. It is argued here, therefore, that the structural approach needs to be supplemented by an inter-actionist perspective.

This thesis therefore stresses routes rather than roots because, firstly, the analysis of structural and cultural change alone cannot explain the specific forms which woman's response to, or reaction against, historical change took. In other words, the particular realizations of the potential for change in gender relations which derived from structural change and was embodied in women's liberation and contemporary feminism cannot be explained solely in terms of the social and historical context in which they emerged.

Rather, contemporary feminism, in the specific forms of women's liberation and the women's movement which succeeded it, is addressed in terms of the concrete social locations from which it emerged as a particular gender-based set of interpretations, representations and political strategies. The thesis focuses upon the processes by which contemporary feminism emerged, diffused and was structured as, in Mannheim's term borrowed from Aristotle, a generational entelechy (Mannheim, 1952), i.e.
a particular realization of a potentiality, or set of potentialities for a specific historical generation of women.

This theoretical framework provides a space for the investigation of why particular women participated in feminism and the women’s movement, the constituency of the Women’s Centre, which routes they took to the movement and the Centre and which social locations these routes traversed. An exclusive attention to the historical context in which the movement emerged cannot encompass an analysis of its uneven development or of the different uses which self-designated feminists such as Centre users made of it.

The Centre users’ routes to Riley House in most cases traversed the intellectual field and the radical and New Left political cultures which structured it during the nineteen sixties and much of the following decade. This field provided the context for the ‘new situations’ in which contemporary feminism developed and in which many of the women at the Centre ‘became’ feminists. The tensions between the older political generation and the early generation of contemporary feminists structured the feminist landscape in which the Centre was located and, it is argued in Chapter 3, contributed to the fragmentation of the Women’s Movement. Social networks derived from these same locations, however, were activated by some of the Centre users as a resource in the struggle to maintain the Centre. An examination of these routes to feminism,
therefore, illuminates both the fragmentation of the National Movement and the survival of the Centre at the local level.

Secondly, a surprisingly large number of women claimed that their decision to join a feminist organization was based upon their reading of books or articles; their routes to the Centre, therefore, were signalled by print commodities rather than direct participation or personal networks. The place of these 'mediated' networks of communication, in the constitution and maintenance of the Centre and the Movement are addressed in detail in Chapter 5 together with their effects in constituting 'official' versions of feminism and thereby contributing to the representation of the Women’s Movement as a relatively coherent and unified entity.

The thesis does not attempt an overview of the organization of gender relations in the social, economic, political or legal spheres, except in so far as they relate directly to Centre users’ perceptions of the world or constitute objects of struggle for the women concerned. The organization and structure of gender relations has been documented by sociologists, economists and political scientists over the last two decades; this documentation indeed constitutes part of the feminist project and its academic status can be viewed as an index of the success of the feminist intellectual formation. The thesis draws upon this documentation, but uses it as a context, albeit largely an implicit one, for the ethnography of the
The amount of time which has elapsed between fieldwork and the production of the thesis, which is due to personal domestic and occupational circumstances, serves to highlight some of the problems involved in the use of the 'ethnographic present' and the relations between history and anthropology. Questions of time and tenses, of stasis and change and of continuity and discontinuity all emerge as central methodological issues in this thesis, and are discussed in the first Chapter.

To summarize briefly, the rate of change in social composition at the Centre, its relocation to another site in 1979, and the demise of the formal women's liberation movement in which Centre users participated, together with political and economic change at local and national levels instituted by the change of government in 1979, underpin a pragmatic decision to use the past tense for description and analysis in the thesis. The Women's Centre has to be located in its historical context; the Women's Centres of 1990 are organized and inhabited on very different bases.

The historical specificity of the context in which research was carried out is particularly important in relation to the careers of the women's movement and the Centre; fieldwork was carried out at a time when the movement was in the process of national fragmentation and at a moment at which the survival of the Centre was under threat at the level of local government. The context of feminism in which fieldwork was embarked upon and the
context in which it was written up were very different ones.

The question of how to frame the Women’s Centre as an object of study leads inevitably to questions concerning centre and periphery.

Feminists mobilized against established cultural traditions and social relations and their gender organization, although of course in their everyday lives they were enmeshed in the very relations which they were seeking to transform. In terms of the dominant cultural order, feminists were constituted as women on the margins.

The established cultural order is defined here i) as consisting of entrenched schemes of classification, rooted in (changing modes) of social life, by means of which the identity of things and persons are established and the social world is ordered and ii) as expressing and supporting specific ensembles of social interests, intentions and desires. The politics, practices, permissions and prohibitions of the Centre users, while derived from and addressing questions central to the lived processes of everyday life were marginal in the sense that they were not incorporated into the established cultural order as lived in the everyday lives of women in general.

To this extent, the Women’s Centre may be sharply demarcated from the more traditional women’s organizations, the Housewives Register, Women’s Institute, Young Wives, Mothers’ Union, and Towns women’s Guild. These are all organized around traditional family
positions, with, in some cases, an acknowledgement of generation. The Young Wives and Mothers Union explicitly recruit and function in terms of gendered marital and parental status; the Housewives Register even more explicitly connotes the place of the wife in the home - the house. The Women's Institute focused primarily, during the nineteen seventies at least, on traditional 'Women's issues', while the Townswomen's Guild organizes its approach to municipal matters strictly on a philanthropic basis reminiscent of nineteenth century notions of a woman's place (Stott, 1977; Davidoff and Hall, 1986; Campbell, 1987).

Feminists however, vehemently opposed the terms on which marriage, motherhood and citizenship were lived and structured in terms of sex and gender; the campaigns and discussions at the Centre were aimed at transforming both the material structures underpinning their gender organization and, as crucially, their lived experience and meanings.

The Women's Centre, as a feminist centre, therefore has to be viewed as on the margins of the established cultural order, and as a site of opposition to it. Opposition and resistance were conducted primarily not through the formal political apparatus and agencies, but through cultural politics, both at the level of everyday life by individual women and collectively across a whole range of cultural practices and extra-parliamentary political strategies.

The Women's Centre functioned as a centre for the
mobilisation of opposition and resistance, for the negotiation of new classifications and representations of the social world and of new self definitions for the women who used it.

Because feminism, in so far as it constitutes a set of oppositional and alternative beliefs, values and practices, is marginal to the mainstream cultural order, and because that feminist politics operates on the periphery of formal political institutions, the Women's Centre can be analysed as an object of study as a centre on the margins.

This formulation draws upon Turner's analysis of the sites of pilgrimages as constituting centres on the margins of everyday life, centres for people who may be otherwise unrelated to one another (Turner, 1974, pp. 231-271). As in Turner's study, the location of the centres on the margins of everyday life does not imply that they are of marginal importance; rather, as in Turner's general approach to journeys and passages between statuses, times and places as meaning - creating experiences, the centre on the margin is of crucial significance in the everyday lives of those who make the journey, or hope to make it. (Turner, 1967, 1969, 1974).

The Women's Centre is, then, presented in this analysis as of central significance to the Centre users, but on the margins of the everyday lives of the vast majority of women. This makes it the more appropriate to focus upon the routes taken by individual women to feminism and the
Women’s Centre than to emphasise the roots of contemporary feminism in the specific structural features of a particular historical conjunction which are familiar from other accounts.

The thesis is premised on ‘the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous’ (Mannheim, 1952, p. 154), that is, the differential rate at which different groups and individuals encounter various aspects of contemporary life, and the differential extent of their involvement with them. On this basis, no sociological or historical overview of ‘second wave feminism’, women’s liberation or the women’s movement can encompass, let alone explain, the variety of ways in which participants perceive and make sense of their participation in a particular feminist grouping or groupings. For this reason too, I take issue with the simplistic classification of Women’s Centres as just one form of a myriad of comparable ‘manifestations’ of the women’s movement (Dalerup, 1986; Coote and Campbell, 1982) because such a classification implies that any one of them can be adequately described in terms of a general history of sociology of feminism or the women’s movement.

The thesis is organized around the negotiation of identity and difference in the Centre, in the women’s movement and the broader feminist formation and with local government. It examines the social networks and communications networks by means of which the women negotiated a feminist identity, a position vis à vis the
women’s movement and an identification with the distinctive feminist community at the Women’s Centre.

It is argued, contrary to the most commonly held view that the women’s movement is based on the small group, that it is in fact social networks which are the fundamental social relations of the movement. The mobilisation and, crucially, the maintenance of the distinctive feminist community at Riley House was primarily conducted by means of social networks and special relationships which crossed the boundaries of both its constituent small groups and the community of identification.

In other words, the thesis argues firstly that the accommodation of difference at the Centre was achieved by the submerging of group identities in the broader Centre community, and secondly that the permeability of the symbolic boundary of the Centre community was an essential factor in the mobilisation and maintenance of that community.

The Centre community maintained its distinctiveness within the social field of the women’s movement not because it was insulated from other feminist organizations and groups – although its difference from these was demarcated inside the Centre, and some feminist Collectives were constructed as Other rather than merely different. Rather, the community depended for its existence on the social networks of ‘insiders’ which linked them to other Centre users and to individuals
outside the Centre and thereby prevented the closure of the groups.

The dynamics of the small group played a key part in the creation and maintenance of feminist consciousness, and thus of the movement itself. Participation in a group also provided the point of entry into the movement for individual women, while at the Centre membership of a group constituted the immediate context of identification.

Nevertheless, Centre users participated in other groups outside the Centre and engaged in a range of other feminist activities, which were reported back to other Centre users in versions which became part of a particular stock of knowledge. Further, Centre users perceived a primary group identification as potentially dangerous, to both the Centre community of identification and to the movement; they operated a 'non-aligned' policy during the period of fieldwork whereby in principle pre-constituted groups were not given access to Riley House.

The permeable boundary and fluid social composition of the Centre militated against its subsumption by one of the two main factions of the women’s movement, which fragmented around the fault-line of the division between radical feminists and socialist feminists in 1978. While the spatial organization and practices at the Centre demonstrate a hierarchy of differences, between women and men, feminists and non-feminists, radical and socialist feminists, ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ the social relations of the individual women permitted their accommodation
Within the Centre.

At the level of the local community, the reclamation of Riley House by the local council precipitated an intensification of a subjective sense of identification among Centre users and in the face of a proposed merger of the Centre Collective with two other Collectives, the Centre became redefined in opposition to a feminist 'Other'. This re-definition of identity itself depended upon negotiations with local councillors which were conducted by means of informal relations with them by individual Centre users.

The Centre community then was organised on the basis of its opposition to the dominant cultural order, but it depended for its existence on the social networks participated in by both Centre users and outsiders. Social links rather than social isolation ensured its survival.

The structure of the thesis reflects the necessity for the analysis of the Centre to be presented in the broader context of feminism and the women's movement and, in Chapter 7, in the context of different feminist positions on how to deal with agents of the local state.

The first part of the thesis therefore focuses in some detail on the emergence and structure of the women's movement and the broader feminist formation, and relates them briefly firstly to the particular ways in which feminist representations and interpretations of the world were negotiated at the Centre and secondly to the specific
ways in which the social networks of the women’s movement were activated by Centre users.

It is argued that the social milieux and political formations from which women’s liberation emerged, together with its structure and organization, underpinned the divisions which both marked the feminist landscape in which the Centre was located, and were contained, deflected or excluded at the Women’s Centre at Riley House. It is also argued that they were a significant source of social networks activated as social resources by Centre users to ensure the survival of the Centre.

Attention is also paid to the means of communication, as well as the forms of communication, by which contemporary feminism, in its varying versions, was diffused. In particular the widespread dissemination of feminist discourses achieved by print communications and the authority conferred by publication on those discourses ‘in print’, is compared with the authenticity assigned to speech and oral communications, and the power achieved in the Centre and other feminist milieux by the spoken word via social networks.

It is argued that an ‘imagined community’ of feminism was achieved by print technology and market distribution which provided the constituency for Women’s Centres and access to the minimal criterion for inclusion in the Centre community at Riley House. At the same time, at the Centre itself personal and participatory knowledges, derived from inclusion in the social dimension of the
community of feminism, functioned to structure informal power relations.

There is, therefore, an emphasis throughout the thesis on the different media and channels of communication and their function in the negotiation of feminist identity, difference and otherness at the Centre.

The thesis then examines the place of the Women’s Centre in the social world of Centre users and former Centre users; the latter includes women who were active in the Collective which established the Centre at Riley House and then moved on, and a consciousness-raising group which withdrew from the Centre.

The social, symbolic and political place which the Centre occupied in the social worlds of Centre users is analysed in relation to the users’ routes to the Centre, their social positions - particularly their social age - and their stories of their lives.

The second part of the thesis locates the Centre in physical, social and political dimensions of (gendered) space and place. The social and symbolic dimensions of the internal spatial organization of the Centre are related to questions of locality. Locality is addressed in terms of the ‘local community’. In practice, locality, in terms of residence and places of work were not significant criteria in the decisions of Centre users to use Riley House; rather, the political and social geography of community politics and the local community defined in terms of the organisation of social
reproduction and local government constituted the key dimensions of locality.

The feminist basis of the Women’s Centre means that a third geographical dimension, the moral dimension, is also a crucial issue. The moral geography of the public and private domains and their gender organization are also addressed, in relation to Centre politics and the feminist challenges to the boundary between the public and the private and wider issues of gender, sexuality and spatial organization; these were articulated in particular campaigns, and acted out by Centre users in a number of different contexts.

Finally, the negotiations between Centre users and representatives of local government regarding a new site for the Centre are examined. These cross-boundary negotiations conducted by Centre users in pursuit of instrumental objectives involved the re-negotiation of feminist identity. These negotiations of difference and identity involved first the construction of feminist Others in opposition to whom the Centre users defined themselves and second the activation of informal ‘special relationships’ by means of which the Centre users organized negotiations with individuals who could be viewed as manifestations of the primary Other of feminism, the patriarchal state.

This section leads to the conclusion that while it was established on the margins of the dominant cultural order and in opposition to the formal political apparatus, the
Centre depended for its existence on social networks which extended into these areas.
1. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this Chapter, methodological issues indicated in the Introduction are pursued in more detail. In 1.1 the questions of time and tenses are examined in relation to ethnography as both a writing practice and a set of fieldwork practices. Ethnography located in a historical perspective is distinguished from ethnographic history, and the structures of theoretical models which are taken as ‘invariant’, that is, obtaining in the present as at the time of research are distinguished from social structures, which it is argued were undergoing rapid change in Britain during the period between fieldwork and the writing of thesis. The implications for the research project of the rapid changes in the women’s movement itself are taken up in 1.5.

The second section, 1.2, deals with questions raised by anthropology ‘at home’ (Cohen, 1986; Jackson, 1987; Strathern, 1987) and addresses conceptual distance and social distance between researcher and research subjects as well as the dimension of temporal distance, which is the focus of 1.1. 1.3 moves to a consideration of the status of feminist texts in the research, and the question of whether the approach adopted in this thesis to the Women’s Centre as a feminist organization necessarily involves a recourse to feminist anthropology. It is argued, after Moore, that the relationship between feminism and anthropology has reached a stage in which
feminist anthropology is based upon the formulation of theoretical questions which privilege gender in the construction, organization and experience of social relations and cultural forms and practice (Moore, 1988, pp. 4-6).

This thesis focuses upon an organization centred on gender politics - or 'sexual politics', in the Centre idiom - and deals with the way in which feminist identity and difference is negotiated there. The Centre was established as part of a generalised set of strategic responses to their experiences of their position as women, orchestrated by some members of a particular historical generation of women. Their perceptions of the structural organization of gender relations constitute the raison d'être of the Centre. The structural organization of gender relations in Britain during the 60s and 70s is therefore taken for granted to some extent in the thesis, and referred to as the context of feminist negotiations rather than a primary object of study.

The next section of the chapter pursues the perennial question of structure and agency. The thesis consists primarily of single locale analysis, an analysis of the ways in which the women at the Centre inhabit their social world, their perceptions of the forces determining everyday life at the Centre and their social positions, and the forms of accommodation, negotiation and resistance in which they engage. It is argued in 1.4 that the concrete, local activities of these women actively
contribute to those relations which become constituted as
the objective relations which structure the local
historical and social matrix of everyday life at the
Centre, and in particular to the organization of these
relations in terms of gender. The structures and
objective relations within which the Centre is situated
are therefore conceptualised as in a two-directional
relationship with the concrete activities and social
relations in which the Centre women participated.

It is argued as in the Introduction, that the Centre
cannot be treated as an entity produced purely in response
to structural determinations and therefore intelligible
exclusively in terms of those structures. The focus of
the thesis is upon the perceptions and responses of the
Centre women to the objective relations structuring their
positions as women, and the Centre is examined here
primarily in relation to the immediate contexts of the
women's movement and the local community.

The final section addresses some of these issues in the
context of this research project in particular. It
recounts the ways in which the theoretical formulation of
the project and a particular 'point of view' was initially
arrived at on the basis of contemporary documentation -
both anthropological and feminist - and was revised during
fieldwork; the means by which entry and access to the
Centre were achieved; the research methods adopted; the
place(s) to which I was assigned as researcher and (as a
condition of entry) feminist and the 'point of view' from
which the ethnography was finally constructed.

1.1 Questions of ethnography: methods of enquiry and writing practices.

Ethnography has been the subject of heated debate over the last two decades, a period which has been defined as one of a 'crisis of representation' when 'paradigmatic styles of social thought are suspended' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986, p. 12). The debates have tended to centre around the textual construction of research subjects as objectified others and the power relations between researchers and their subjects. Traditional empirical ethnography is widely regarded as conflating fact and interpretation through the construction of the 'fact' of the other, and masking the power relations implicit in the ethnographer's production of an authoritative version of the research subjects who are in fact presented from the position of the (absent) ethnographer in a third-person text (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Grossberg, 1990).

In fact, ethnography involves both a particular writing practice, in which the other is inscribed within and explained by the ethnographer's text and a certain kind of practice in the field. Recent critiques of ethnography such as those cited above have tended to focus on ethnography as the discursive production of the other, whereby research subjects are produced by the authorial power of the ethnographer. This focus conflates the
material practices involved in fieldwork and discursive practice; it also privileges the relations of power which are constituted in the communicative domain, i.e. in discursive production, over relations of power in the field, thereby contributing to the authority of the ethnographic texts which they criticise.

Critics of ethnographic discourses have variously prescribed a dialogue between the ethnographer and research-subjects and self-reflexivity as ways in which research subjects may be incorporated into the discourse as active speakers rather than discursive objects and to undermine, through reflection upon it, the power of the author. The problem with both of these strategies is that they both re-inscribe the ethnographer’s position in the discourse as primary. After all, it is the authors who reflect upon their authorial position, or select the dialogues or social exchanges which are included in the discourse. Moreover, the fact is that ethnographic discourses are the outcome of specific methodological and theoretical projects in which the ethnographers and research subjects are involved on different terms and with different objectives. The incorporation of the ethnographer in the text through the use of the first person does not alter this fact. It may indeed obscure it.

If the project of ethnography is the explanation and interpretation of the ways in which people inhabit and make sense of a particular social world, then these
interpretations and explanations are aimed primarily at the ethnographer’s co-culturals or colleagues - or in the case of a thesis, they are aimed at validation by those with more power within a particular disciplinary field. The project and framework need to be clear to these readers.

For these reasons, I have chosen to write this thesis - except for the sections which consist of reflections on fieldwork - in the third person, narrative mode. In general, I accept that, as the author I shall inevitably be constructing discursive objects in the process of writing. In terms of the theoretical and methodological frameworks, however, the research subjects are viewed as active subjects. I also use the third person because by adopting a narrator’s position I acknowledge the fact that as a researcher I was primarily an observer at the Women’s Centre, and that the terms on which I participated in it were different from the ways in which the other women participated, as discussed in 1.5. Ethnography is always about traversing the distance between the familiar and the strange, and to some extent the fieldworker is always a stranger, and must be; otherwise all that happens is taken for granted.

Fieldworkers always enter a particular social or cultural environment as at least a partial stranger, and their place in this environment is continually negotiated and re-negotiated; the situational position of the fieldworker varies considerably according to the group,
individuals or context concerned. In such situations it is the subjects of research who, through their possession of local knowledge and their taking for granted of the ground rules of social action in their own milieux, are in a powerful situation. As Carol Warren points out, research subjects can set the terms on which entrée to a particular social environment can be obtained, and assign the fieldworker to what they perceive as her proper place in the social order (Warren, 1988, p. 4).

At the Women’s Centre, access was restricted to ‘feminists’ as noted in the Introduction. Entrée to the Centre required that I should have some knowledge of feminist politics and practice. Access to informal gatherings was extended on different terms by different groups. My personal credentials were elicited by several women at the Centre, and to some extent functioned to ease my acceptance by some groups. I am a white woman of roughly the same age as most of the women at the Centre, divorced, a mother, a graduate, and at the time I had a part-time job and was living in private sector rented accommodation in an area with which most of them were familiar; these factors were taken into consideration by the Riley House women, and different groups assigned me an appropriate place in their social worlds and treated me accordingly. The fact that I was engaged in research on the Women’s Centre was integrated in different ways by different individuals and groups with these others factors. Some only tolerated my researcher role on the
basis of my other social credentials and a sufficient amount of knowledge of feminism. The implications for the research project of the different places to which I was assigned are pursued in 1.5.

The main point here, however, is that the question of social distance, and the place to which a researcher is assigned on the basis of her or his social credentials needs to be distinguished from conceptual distance and, in the case of the ethnographic text, from temporal distance. The question of conceptual distance is returned to in 1.2 below. Temporal distance and social distance are, however, closely related at the moment of writing, as opposed to field practice, and need to be addressed here in relation to the way in which this thesis is written.

Bourdieu, in his reflections on 'Time and tenses' in *Homo Academicus* (1988), cites Kraus's argument that analysis is more likely to be approved intellectually, the more distantly the objects of study are located in social space, and argues for the use of the present tense to mark that social distance.

Bourdieu is engaged here in arguing that research carried out twenty years earlier should be presented in the present tense; he argues for 'the omnitemporal present of scientific discourse' to mark social distance and eschews any reference to 'a situated and dated past' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 33). In his view, the present tense is appropriate for reports on 'structural invariants which can be observed to function constantly in the historic
present' and are 'valid for everything which is true at the moment of enquiry and is still true at the moment of reading' (ibid., p. 34).

Even if we accept Bourdieu's argument, and leaving aside the question of whether the events of 1968 may not have caused changes in the structure of the academic universe which he was studying at the time, it is still justifiable to use the past tense in the case of the Women's Centre, for fieldwork was carried out during a period of significant change in the women's movement and of rapid structural change, in terms of the national political economy as well as the global context.

The events of the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978 and their consequences, the economic recession and the General Elections of 1979 marked political and economic changes in the national context which directly affected the ways in which the women at the Centre inhabited their social world, and the social and historical matrix in which their world was located. An ethnography has to be located in its historical context, and in contexts of rapid structural change, an ethnography can present no more than a frozen moment in historical time.

It is 'true at the moment of reading' that the Women's Centre which moved from Riley House to another site in the borough still exists, and that the women's movement to which it was closely related is still in existence as they were at 'the moment of enquiry'. Their structure, organization, social composition and above all, their
meanings, have dramatically changed over the last decade, however. Further, the Women's Liberation Movement has now no formal existence. The thesis therefore uses the past tense, to indicate the temporal distance between the Centre and the movement then and now, and to acknowledge the changes in social, political and economic structures over the last decade. The present tense is used to discuss analytical and theoretical models, which should prove valid, and therefore 'true', in the present.

The fact that the 'shared present' of fieldwork is distanced by time from the moment of writing the thesis and signalled by the use of the past tense does not, however, change ethnography into history. The methods of fieldwork in an interactive social context, and the focus upon this 'shared present' distinguish anthropology from history, which bases its research on documentation, in the case of oral history using autobiography and recollections as documents, as well as written texts and material culture. For this thesis, feminist texts published or circulated since fieldwork, as well as academic texts, are used as supplementary texts, providing retrospective views on the period of fieldwork. There is no attempt here, however, to pursue the career of the Centre, or its relations with feminism, the women's movement or local government after the period of fieldwork.
1.2 Anthropology at home

The question of conceptual distance between researcher and research subjects arises again in the context of ethnographic research with particular groups or in certain social domains ‘at home’ (Cohen, 1984, 1986; Jackson, 1987; Strathern, 1987). In ethnography ‘at home’, the question is whether sufficient distance from the research subjects can be achieved by the researcher to achieve objectivity within a cultural configuration in which some elements are taken for granted, or held to be self-evident by all the social actors involved (Douglas, 1975).

If, as proposed above, ethnography always involves traversing the distance between the familiar and the strange, in ethnography at home the boundary between the familiar and strange is not clearly defined. Geographical proximity, shared social structures and tacitly shared cultural assumptions may blur the boundary. On the other hand, however, the traditional unfamiliar other of anthropological study may be already familiar to a researcher from other forms of representation, notably anthropological literature or material culture. In the case of a feminist organization, feminist literature can apparently render the research subjects familiar. In this case, as in many others, the familiar from one vantage point can seem strange from another, that is, from the standpoint of the researcher whose project in framing an object of study is the de-familiarization of the
apparently familiar.

Part of the project of bringing anthropology back home is, to adopt the formalist term, 'making strange'; the defamiliarization of that which is superficially familiar by bringing to bear a range of questions which have been addressed to research subjects in contexts in which these are relatively unproblematically constructed as 'other'.

Whereas in traditional anthropology these questions are investigated with the intention of rendering the strange intelligible and familiar, by means of cultural translation, the project of anthropology at home is firstly to problematize the taken-for-granted aspects of social life which researcher and subjects share, and secondly to reveal the different ways in which a broadly shared social environment are inhabited by research subjects and the different practices and meanings which may be organized around social relations which at first sight seem to be familiar.

In other words, the project of anthropology at home involves developing and maintaining a conceptual distance from those social relations and questioning them, in order to reveal unanticipated dimensions of the known world, or in Grossberg's phrase 'to open new perspectives on a familiar landscape' (Grossberg, 1990, p. 24). The thesis aims to open new perspectives on the social world of the feminists at the Women's Centre, perspectives which are different from the representations of feminism within popular culture and from those based on sociological and
historical texts which rest upon statistical and documentary evidence.

The thesis also aims to present perspectives different from those contained in 'authoritative' sources which claim to represent the 'true' version of feminism, in all its diversity, and thus imply that everyday life at the Centre can be inferred to be a reflection or refraction of published discourses on feminism. In fact, just as the Centre cannot be seen as a metonymic paradigm for the women's movement or the contemporary feminist formation, the relations and practices and the meanings assigned to them at the Centre cannot be inferred in any unproblematic manner from feminist texts, or indeed from general feminist oral communications. As noted in the Introduction, the negotiation of feminist identity and difference at the Centre, and between feminists who identified with the Centre community and those who did not, provides the focus of the thesis.

1.3 The status of texts

The general question of the relations between the 'official' discourses of feminism which achieve authority through publication also raises more specific questions regarding the status of texts. Feminist texts are used in three different ways in the thesis; as evidence, as objects of study, and in some cases as authoritative sources which can legitimately be cited in an academic
context.

In the first case, feminist texts are deployed as evidence of particular feminist positions, whether political, ontological, or epistemological, especially in Chapters 2 and 3 which define the women's movement and feminist formation, trace their history, and relate their structure and organization to both relations and practices at the Centre and to the fragmentation of the women's movement. They are, in this case, treated relatively unproblematically as documentary evidence, in a manner similar to 'native texts' or 'indigenous literature' in traditional anthropology.

They are also, however, treated throughout the thesis as objects of study in two main ways. Firstly as they are analysed as the chief means by which, as print commodities distributed through the retail market, women's liberation and 'second-wave' feminism was extended and diffused from the enclaves in which they emerged. Secondly they are studied in terms of the ways in which they underpinned an imaginative community of feminism, thirdly as the basis for several women's decisions to 'join' the Centre and finally as the key means by which particular feminist discourses achieved the status of 'official' versions of feminism and thereby both structured the constituency of women's movement organizations (including the Centre) and promoted division within the movement - often in the name of that movement.

These issues are addressed in 2.2, and 2.3. The final
way in which some feminist texts are used raises a methodological rather than a theoretical point, that is, the extent to which feminist theoretical texts can be used as authoritative sources in an academic context where similar texts are taken as objects of study and used as documentary evidence. To the extent that these texts have sufficient functional weight in the intellectual field to achieve academic legitimacy, they are cited in this thesis is the same way as texts from any other disciplinary or interdisciplinary field. In so doing, I am resting on my argument that authority for 'women's voice' in feminist discourse has indeed been achieved through the legitimation of feminist theory in the intellectual field.

Because of the varying status of feminist texts in this thesis, there is no formal review of the literature on feminism since most of it, with relatively few exceptions, is written by self designated feminists, writing either as academics or as participants. A good deal of the literature is listed in the bibliography and cited at appropriate points in the body of the thesis.

The second point to note is the lack of specific reference in the thesis to literature on the anthropology of women. This absence arises because much of the anthropological literature deals with the structural position of women in other societies or addresses the question of the subordination of women at a general theoretical level and the status of gender within anthropology and sociology; (Ardener, 1975; Rosaldo and
Lamphere, 1974; Reiter, 1975; Edholm, Harris and Young, 1977; Harris and Young, 1974; Moore, 1988; Strathern, 1984). The literature relevant to the structural position of women in Britain tends to be published under the rubric of sociology or women’s studies.

Henrietta Moore has argued that a focus upon the position of women in culture and society represents an early stage of feminist anthropology; in her view the story of the relationship between feminism and anthropology is one of the movement from a focus upon women to a focus upon gender as a central category. For Moore, feminist anthropology formulates its theoretical questions in terms of how kinship, ritual, and economics are organized and experienced through gender, as distinct from traditional anthropological practices which investigate kinships, ritual, economics and gender in terms of how these are constructed, organized and experienced through culture (Moore, 1988, p. 6).

This thesis focuses upon how a particular group of women organized and experienced their social relations and practices in terms of gender politics within a particular historical, social and cultural matrix, with the structural position of women in Britain as a context not directly addressed. As noted in the Introduction, the ethnography of the Women’s Centre involves an examination of the ways in which the women concerned negotiate strategic responses to their perceptions of their social, economic, political and ideological positions, both in
terms of their everyday life - particularly in the case of the Women’s Therapy Group and the consciousness-raising group which withdrew from the Centre - and of their political analysis and strategies, particularly in the case of the feminist socialist group at the Centre and the women’s movement in general. The ways in which gender positions mediate objective social relations is therefore addressed through the perceptions and responses of the research subjects.

1.4 Gender, structure and agency

The ways in which the women at the Centre perceived, responded to and resisted the organization of gender relations, rather than the gender relations themselves, thus constitute the primary objects of study. In other words, the thesis aims to provide an ethnography of a feminist organization, rather than a feminist anthropology. To re-formulate this in terms of the perennial question of structure and agency, the thesis focuses upon the ‘local historical matrices of ... experiences’, in Dorothy Smith’s phrase (Smith, 1989, p. 129).

Smith is concerned with ‘the social problematics of everyday life’, in which the term ‘problematic’ is transposed from its usual locus in philosophical or scientific discourse to the social organization of everyday life. Research focuses upon the relationship of
the local knowledges of objective social relations held by research subjects and the function of these relations in determining the everyday world inhabited by the ethnographic subjects as gendered subjects - that is, as women. From this point of view the research subject is the knower; she has direct local knowledge which the ethnographer has to discover. The ethnographer has access to other forms of knowledge, textual and conceptual, regarding the wider context of the local matrices within which the research subjects deploy their knowledge and against which they re-act or develop strategies of response. These forms of knowledge are drawn upon in the analysis and interpretation of those relations and practices which characterise the world inhabited by the research subjects, and as discussed in 1.5, reviewed and amended in the process of research.

Smith's model is a particularly useful one in the case of the Women's Centre because she stresses the centrality of a theoretical acknowledgement of the active part played by them, as concrete women, in the constitution of not only the local, particular relations in which they participate but also of those which extend beyond their observable social worlds and become constituted as the objective relations of the broader cultural configuration, the social structure, and the economy (Smith, 1989, p. 142).

This thesis, as noted in the Introduction, focuses upon the local and particular relations of the Women's Centre
and frames them as responses to structural features of
gender organization. This focus should not however be
allowed to obscure the fact that feminist action, at the
Centre and elsewhere, also contributed to changes in the
organization of gender relations, the 'objective
relations' which shape the structural determinants of
society.

The career of the instrumental negotiations between the
women at the Centre and the local Council and their
successful outcome demonstrate that feminist politics and
the women's movement actively influenced local and
national politics, as discussed in Chapter 7. In other
words, the processes and activities of the Women's Centre
cannot be examined without bearing in mind the changes in
gender relations in the family, social policy and law and
at the workplace which feminist political action,
orchestrated at sites which included the Women's Centre
was instrumental in achieving. The objective relations
which determine the position of women and shape the
matrices of everyday life at the Centre were also directly
affected by the social, cultural and political activities
in which the Centre women engaged.

The Centre cannot therefore be conceptualised as
insulated from the broader social contexts in which it
existed, or as functioning in an exclusively reactive
manner. The distinction between an 'insider' and an
'outsider' and between externally generated social
relations and forms of knowledge and action and internal
ones cannot be viewed as a firm line which insulates participants of the Centre community from the outside world to the extent proposed by Turner for his 'existential communitas' (Turner, 1979; Martin, 1981).

Nevertheless, while the Centre has to be located in its wider social context, the thesis functions primarily as a single-locale analysis; analysis is focused upon social practice at the Centre and the cross-boundary relations in which the Centre users engaged in the contexts of the women's movement and the local community, rather than emphasizing the structural position of women which is, as noted earlier, to some extent taken for granted at a general level.

1.5 Research issues: the (re-)formulation of the research project, research methods and 'points of view'.

In this section, I briefly review the contexts in which the research project was formulated and fieldwork undertaken, the organization and methods of the research undertaken, the place assigned to me/adopted by me at the Women's Centre and the constraints which I encountered there and finally the re-formulation of the project on the basis of specific historical events and the fieldwork experience.

The initial formulation of the research project needs to be outlined and contextualised in relation to issues of
time and texts discussed at a general level in 2.1 and 2.2. The documentary, historical and experiential contexts in which the project was formulated and later revised and in which fieldwork carried out are all relevant to my selection of a 'point of view' and the corresponding focus on certain issues and configurations rather than others which characterise my research.

The project was framed in 1976 and 1977 as an ethnography of a feminist organization - not as an exercise in feminist anthropology. I envisaged an investigation of a Women’s Centre as a local manifestation of the women’s liberation movement, a study of feminist consciousness in action. I began fieldwork in the Autumn of 1977 with a set of expectations derived partly from contemporary literature and partly from my own (restricted and partial) participation in feminist events. I anticipated that the Centre would prove to be a relatively coherent, relatively autonomous grouping with an investment in the local community as well as the national movement. I expected the small group to function as the basis for collective action and I anticipated a clear division between tendencies which could be classified as radical feminist and socialist feminist with a relatively clear correspondence between the group activities and radical or socialist feminist politics. I also expected to encounter discussion of particular issues - sexuality, violence against women, the sexual division of labour, and strategies for the empowerment of women through decision-
making processes and mutual 'self-help'.

Contrary to my expectations, I encountered a grouping with a routinized social organization and decision-making processes undertaken unselfconsciously and treated for the most part as 'going without saying' and multiple group membership with several of the Centre users attending groups outside the Centre; co-operation between socialist feminists and self-designated radical feminists within the Centre - even in the Core Collective; a policy of 'non-alignment'; repeated murmurs against 'Movement Women with capitals' and the regular activation of social networks extending beyond the Centre and the movement together with very little investment in local campaigns. There was little discussion of the issues which I had taken to be central to feminism.

The disjunction between my expectations and the actual organization and processes at Riley House needs to be seen in the historical context of fieldwork, the history of the movement and the history of the Centre. The reformulation of the research project has to be seen in the context of fieldwork, the terms on which I participated in the Centre, the research methods which I used, the place(s) to which I was assigned by Centre users and the constraints under which research was carried out - in other words, the terms of engagement.

My original expectations derived for the most part from the feminist literature available at the time. This body of literature can be roughly divided into three categories
- the 'authorized' versions of feminism and the movement, 'proprietorial narratives' (Cheater, 1986, p. 165) by feminists active in the movements and, in so far as it addresses or employs feminist theory, academic literature. The distinctions between these three categories are not totally clear-cut but they proved to be relevant later in my research; they also inform the 'movement of reading' of the research, since the 'authorized' versions have been retrospectively confirmed by subsequent citations and reviews. The status of this 'authorized' body of literature (notably Mitchell, 1964, 1971; Rowbotham, 1972, 1973; Wandor, 1972; Freeman, 1974; Mitchell and Oakley, 1976) derives largely from institutional legitimation and publication by established publishing houses.

These accounts also gain authority from the academic feminism of their authors in established disciplinary fields (history, sociology, psychology, etc.) and have a strong proprietorial element. Nevertheless, they can be clearly distinguished from both the feminist academic texts and those 'proprietorial narratives' which base their claims to authority on participation in the movement and consist of personal testimonies and statements and the embracing of a feminist identity by their writers. These narratives were generally published in feminist publications - WIRES, Spare Rib, and a range of ephemeral publications.¹ They did not achieve the status of the

¹ These have recently been reviewed in detail in Robotham's history of the Women's Movement (Rowbotham, 1990) and used selectively in Coote and Campbell 1983.
'authorized' versions, but they indicate a range of different positions and address a large number of issues which, in the period prior to the publication of feminist journals such as the Feminist Review, did not achieve widespread publication elsewhere (in Britain, at least).

These three categories of feminist literature constituted the documentary sources for my 'point of view'. They also provided me with the basic feminist credentials necessary to gain entrée to the Centre. Later, they also became objects of study in my attempt to analyse the ongoing negotiations of feminist identity at the Centre and to reconceptualise the structure and organisation of the women's movement. It is also worth noting the 'experiential' sources of my point of view - and indeed, my decision to carry out research on a feminist organization in the first place. These were constituted by my participation in feminist academic seminars, attendance at a few feminist meetings (Campaign for the Financial and Legal Independence of Women) and participation in a demonstration against the White Bill which aimed to restrict the Abortion Law (Reform) Act of 1967. These, together with contacts with feminists active in other campaigns, constituted the experiential dimension of the sources from which the research project derived which, together, constituted a familiar face of feminism. This was rapidly de-familiarized during the period of fieldwork from October 1977 to November 1978.

Fieldwork was carried out at a moment of 'crisis' in
the women's movement, signalled in 1974 by the simultaneous diffusion of feminism and the appropriation of a feminist label for all 'woman-centred' activities and artefacts on the one hand, and the polarization of radical feminist and socialist feminist tendencies on the other. This polarization constituted the faultline along which the movement finally fragmented in 1978, in circumstances which have been debated ever since. (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1980; Coote and Campbell, 1983; Mitchell and Oakley, 1986; Segal, 1987).

The year 1977-78 also constituted a movement of crisis for the Women's Centre; the local Council re-claimed Riley House and proposed that the Centre should share a site with two other collectives already in residence, elsewhere in the borough. It was in the context of the negotiations for a new site that I carried out fieldwork; for most of that year, the politically active Centre users concentrated on instrumental negotiations with the Council, while all the Centre users came to define themselves as a distinctive community of identification against another feminist organisation in a struggle for their survival. These processes and events are discussed in Chapter 7.

I began fieldwork, then, at a particular and historically specific moment of the career of the Riley House Centre and the Movement. My entrée to the Centre was achieved on the basis of my feminist credentials, discussed earlier. I introduced myself to Centre users at
the beginning of a communal meal, on a Tuesday evening when the socialist feminist group were meeting, and I introduced myself as a feminist, 'doing research' on Women's Centres. I was equipped with a 'name', the name of Marj, an Anglo-American woman who had been a member of the Collective which founded the Women's Centre on its original site in Belsize Park and who was currently a full-time organizer for the National Abortion Campaign. Initially, I attended the Centre on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings, participating in the Socialist-feminist discussion group on the family, the Women's Therapy Group, and the Collective meeting. Later, I came to the Centre on Saturdays to answer the telephone and deal with inquiries - but never alone.

I also discovered that many of the feminist activists at the Centre participated in other groups, and in 1978 I attended meetings of the North London socialist-feminist group, the Women's Arts Alliance meetings on Friday evenings, seminars on feminism at the Communist University of London Summer School, the 1978 National Conference of the Women's liberation movement, the demonstration against the Benyon Bill and the lobby of the Leisure Services sub-committee of Camden Council organised by the Centre users in June 1978.

In the Spring of 1978 the discussion group on the family faded out; by this time, I was able to meet with members of the Women's Therapy group at their homes, to contact three women in the Consciousness-raising group.
which had withdrawn from the Centre and invite them for discussions at my home, and to invite Marj and Laurie, (a member of the socialist feminist group) for discussions at home also. Eight of these 'front-room' sessions, as Cheater has characterised them, as, distinguished from 'back-yard' research focused upon marginal groups in one's own society (Cheater, 1987), were tape recorded, and the thirty hours of discussion provided some of the material cited in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.

These sessions were organized as discussions rather than as interviews. In choosing research methods, I decided to take up a non-directive and non-initiating position, for two main reasons. Firstly, I wanted to participate in the Centre on the Centre's own terms; hence my decision to introduce myself as 'a feminist doing research'. Secondly, I wanted to discover the criteria of inclusion in or exclusion from the Centre, and to experience for myself the processes involved.

This decision involved, primarily, participation in the Centre which was organized around watching and listening. I took notes, but did not use a tape recorder at the Centre. I participated in discussion, but did not initiate any specific topics for debate, I did not recount my own stories of other feminist events and did not change the subject in group discussions.¹ I asked specific

¹ Interestingly, these practices have been characterised as constituting a typically 'feminine' conversational mode for White middle class Anglo-American women in male-female interactions in the USA (Lakoff, 1974).
questions in the informal contexts before the meetings and afterwards in the pub.

This decision regarding a non-interventionary research strategy produced both benefits and constraints. The more politically active Centre-users, in the socialist-feminist group and the core Collective, for the most part assigned me a feminist identity rather than a 'research' one. They were not particularly interested in the research; they did not ask me about my aims or reasons for doing it. There was, therefore, little apparent conflict between my persona as feminist and researcher. My rating as a feminist, however, was apparently not very high. I participated, but was not perceived to be committed or an activist. I did not share the feminist history which underpinned many of the conversations between Centre users. I did not even have any political contacts in the locality which could be useful in the struggle to ensure the survival of the Riley House community.

As I was sighted more frequently at other feminist events, however, I was increasingly accepted, in so far as I was invited to 'come in' some Saturdays and was asked to help clear the table after meals and participate in the washing up. I received a phone call from one of the socialist feminist group after I missed a meeting, inquiring if I needed a baby-sitter and offering her services. My inclusion in the division of labour and in informal conversation, together with my recognition at encounters outside the Centre served to signal some kind
of acceptance, although my terms of engagement were still not regarded highly enough to ensure my inclusion as a key member of the Collective.

Active participation in feminist projects, in the social dimension of the Women's Movement was clearly valued more highly than any discursive knowledge I had. This alerted me to the tension between documentary knowledges and the authority conferred by publication on 'authorized' feminist positions and experiential or participatory knowledges, such as those in evidence in the 'proprietorial narratives', and between oral communications and print communications at the Centre. These are discussed in 2.4 and pursued in Chapters 3 and 5.

My assignment to and adoption of a non-activist feminist position was complicated by the fact that the most active Centre-users were extremely busy, and frequently pre-occupied with the negotiations for a new site and other political activities - in the Labour and Communist parties and Women Against Racism and Fascism and the Anti-Nazi League - as well as with their jobs. It proved difficult to organize discussions with them outside the Centre. With some of the Centre users, it proved impossible. This fact necessarily contributed to qualitative differences in the material volunteered by the Centre users. Women meeting in the 'front-room' sessions tended to tell more personal stories of their routes to the Centre and the Movement than those who spoke at the
Centre, the pub or other feminist venues. The latter tended to discuss the history of the Centre and the movement in more collective terms with little discussion of their personal lives.

Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, differences in style emerged clearly between the feminist socialists on the one hand and the Women's Therapy and Consciousness-raising groups on the other, with the former presenting histories of feminism with a collective basis and the latter presenting personal narratives. As Katie King points out, 'origin stories about the Women's movement are interested stories, all of them' (King, 1986, p. 65) — including my own account in Chapter 3. What is clear from the stories told by the Centre users and discussed in Chapter 4, is that two sets of interests, the collective and the personal, were differently inflected by the two groupings of Centre users in their stories of how they came to found or to join the Centre and 'How they Became' feminists.

The revision of the research project to focus upon the negotiation of feminist identities and the accommodation of difference at the Centre in the context of the fragmentation of the Women's movement (re-conceptualised to take account of the Centre users perceptions and histories) then developed in the course of fieldwork and was based on experiential as well as documentary material. The historical specificity of the context in which fieldwork was carried out, the constraints encountered in
the politicized environment at the Centre and the research methods used all contributed to the final framing of the research project and the formulation of an inter-action approach.

My position at the Centre, to summarize, therefore involved a part-identity as feminist and a part-identity as researcher; a clear example of Cheater’s model of a researcher with a ‘multiple self’ (Cheater, 1987).

On the one hand, as a researcher sympathetic to feminism I had a subjective alignment to the subjects of the research; on the other hand, my restricted participation at the Centre and the maintenance of a ‘critical distance’, together with the production of an ethnographic text, have inevitably produced those subjects as the ‘others’ of research. At least, I hope that they emerge as specific and particular subjects with their own stories and practices in a locally and historically specific context which cannot be unproblematically subsumed by the ‘authorized’ accounts.
2. THE WOMEN'S CENTRE, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE FEMINIST FORMATION

This Chapter introduces the Women's Centre at Riley House by providing a brief descriptive analysis of the Centre in terms of its location, history, social composition and organisation and its relations with the local community and the women's movement in 2.1.

The second part of the Chapter moves on to analyse the structure, composition and social and discursive fields of the women's movement and the broader feminist formation as the social, cultural and political context of the Centre and the negotiations of feminist identity and difference in process there. The feminist formation is defined in terms analogous to those employed by Raymond Williams in his definition of an intellectual formation as an effective and conscious cultural movement with an active influence on cultural forms and practices, no manifest institutional form, and relations with formal institutions ranging from the 'oblique' to the oppositional (Williams, 1977, p. 116).

The feminist formation is defined at its most general level at a discursive formation organized around the basic elements of what Adrienne Rich defines as the 'shared language' of feminism (Rich, 1981, p. 28).

The women's movement is specified as constituting the social dimension of the feminist formation, as the social field of personal networks and mediated communication
networks, and is in turn distinguished from the Women's Movement.

The Women's Movement with capitals, is defined in terms of its operation through named groups with sectarian elements, each claiming to represent the 'true' form of feminism and opposing other feminist groupings rather than accepting them as comparable and valid, albeit different, manifestations of feminism. The "Movement" is related to but distinguished from the various cultural and political currents of feminism.

The Women's Centre is located in relation to these three different forms of feminism in 2.3, with particular attention to the mobilisation of a distinctive Centre community around a shared stock of knowledge. It traces the sources of these 'local' forms of knowledge, the routes by which they are relayed to various women at the Centre from the social field of the women's movement and the means by which they are converted into shared 'insider' knowledge or deployed in a restricted way which structures the informal power relations at the Centre.

2.1 Introduction to the Centre. An overview of its location, history, structure and organization

This introduction to the Centre provides a descriptive outline account of the groups and activities at the Centre, and is intended to indicate issues which are addressed in
more detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in the context of the Centre, and in the remainder of this chapter and Chapters 3 and 4 in the broader context of the feminist formation and its various dimensions.

The Women's Centre was established at Riley House, in Belsize Park, in the Borough of Camden in North West London to provide a social space for women only. The site was provided by the Leisure Services Committee of Camden Council after several months of negotiation, to serve as an advice, information and social Centre for local women. During the period of fieldwork, the Centre was open during the evenings and at weekends, and was used regularly by between 20 and 25 women attending Women’s Therapy and Feminist Socialist Network group meetings, the Thursday evening meeting of the Collective and informal discussions. In the earlier years, self-defence groups, health groups and consciousness-raising groups had all met there on a weekly basis. It also had strong links with a Women’s Refuge located nearby.

At Collective meetings, decisions were taken about the day to day organization of the Centre and the allocation of various tasks, about which groups could be admitted to regular use of the Centre, and about negotiations with the Council and its representatives regarding the future of the Centre.

The Women’s Centre, however, did not claim to be a Centre for the ‘local community’, although it functioned as a site where advice and information regarding women’s
rights, benefits and organizations could be obtained by local women and various activities were available for them. It did not serve as a Centre for all women, either; when asked who could attend meetings at the Centre, a member of the Collective who founded the Centre replied 'any feminist'.

The Centre thus claimed openly a feminist identity, and while it served as an advice and referral Centre for local women, it reserved the right to restrict access to regular use of Riley House to those women who were deemed feminists.

The Centre at Riley House had its origins in a women's liberation group, consisting of women who initiated the women's liberation movement in 1968 and 1969, which founded a refuge for battered wives and their children in the same ward of the borough in 1973. After two years, the Women's Refuge was relocated, and the women's liberation group continued to meet on the premises, to exchange information on developments within the movement, to debate particular issues, and mobilise support for specific campaigns - campaigns for equal pay and equal opportunities for women, for Legal and Financial Independence for Women, and for the Working Women's Charter. This group, the Belsize Park Collective, with a changed and slightly expanded membership but similar interests and activities, formed the Collective which founded the Centre at Riley House.

Riley House also provided a venue for feminists from
other groupings to publicize particular events, mobilise support for campaigns, meetings, lobbies and demonstrations of various kinds and pass on information on their own or other groups activities. From this point of view, the Centre provided a social and symbolic focus for feminists in the metropolitan area, whether resident locally, employed in the locality, travelling from other London boroughs or just passing through the city. One woman who regularly attended the Centre described it as primarily a meeting place.

'[It's] A place to meet. A place where other people can come if they want to. A place where you can advertise things going on .... It belongs to everyone who comes here'.

The 'other people' who could attend, however, were implicitly female, while those attending regularly were feminists. The permissions and prohibitions governing inclusion in or exclusion from the Centre were generally taken for granted, despite a history of debate over which groups and individuals should not be admitted. These debates are examined in 5.4. The feminist population using the Centre was fluid, and the boundaries of the Centre, in social and symbolic terms, were permeable.

Degrees of 'belonging' were also variable. While the Centre 'belongs to everyone' - i.e. all feminist women, in principle at least - the women who visited the Centre only occasionally, whether to ask for information, to socialise, or to exchange feminist information and mobilise support for a particular cause or campaign, were
not perceived by the women who used the Centre regularly as 'belonging' to the Centre. As Gellner notes in his discussion of national communities, 'belonging' rests not only upon shared codes of communication, but also upon mutual recognition (Gellner, 1982, p. 3).

Belonging also involves, most crucially, personal and collective identification. The degrees to which particular groups and individuals identified with the Centre community, and the contexts in which they did so, varied considerably. The encompassing 'we' which was used at Collective meetings by women who regularly attended them signalled a subjective community of identification at Riley House which was underpinned by observable, objective, collective practices.

For other women, who attended group meetings regularly but not the Collective, a primary identification with a group or a network was evident most of the time. A member of the socialist-feminist discussion group, which participated in a 'socialist-feminist network' organized in 1974, distanced herself from the women at the Centre.

'I'm not in touch with them anymore. I see them at conferences and we say hello and talk .... I'm in a totally different group now. The group I'm in is doing things outside the Centre. We're also doing things inside the Centre, but we're doing more outside'.

The 'outside' activities are deemed more important than the 'inside' ones in this account.

Two women who regularly attended both the Women's Therapy Group and Collective meetings claimed that they
attended the latter out of duty 'But if I want support, I go to the Therapy Group'.

The groups, including the Collective, meeting at the Centre were perceived in different ways by different group members, and performed different functions on different occasions.

Nevertheless, the Centre emerged regularly throughout the period of fieldwork as the focus for a distinctive community of identification at meetings held at the Centre and elsewhere. The 'We' of the Centre community was used with increasing regularity as the Council claimed Riley House for re-development. Threatened with the loss of their physical site and their particular set of 'insider' knowledges, practices, and social relations which tended on other occasions to be taken for granted, individual women and groups put more stress on their identification with the Centre community, and privileged it above both their group affiliations and their commitment to 'sisterhood', the overarching 'imaginative identification of sisterhood', as Rich termed it (Rich, 1981).

The Organisation of the Women’s Centre

The Centre was organised on feminist principles on the basis of participation rather than representation, with no formal leadership or hierarchy, and with an egalitarian division of labour. Decisions regarding the running of the Centre were made by the Collective, as noted earlier,
at the Thursday evening meetings, and any woman who regularly attended the Centre could participate. In principle, the Collective meeting was open to all women.

In practice, a group of four women met regularly and took the responsibility of 'organising the Centre'. Two women had belonged to the Belsize Park Collective, two women had joined the Collective on a regular basis during the negotiations for the Riley House site. This group is referred to as the 'Core Collective'; if the Centre 'belongs to everyone', it belonged in an immediate way to this group. As Marje, a former member of the Core Collective made clear, responsibility for the Centre was not equally shared despite the egalitarian and participatory philosophy:

'The [Collective] meetings are the same as they were two years ago. Just discussion about the Centre. Who cleaned up, that kind of thing. That is the really awful part of being in the Collective, you see it as your ... the Centre is your responsibility as a building. Because nobody else does it, you get lumbered'.

The social organization of the Centre, then, was the subject of some complaint, but in general it was taken for granted rather than the subject of debate. While 'subcultures of mutual self-help' (Rowbotham, 1986) and active participation in decision-making process were generally acknowledged in feminist theory and practice as central to the empowerment of women, they were not a primary concern at the Centre during the period of fieldwork.
This relative lack of concern regarding social organization can be related to three factors: the division within the Movement at national level, the proposed reclamation of Riley House by the local Council and the shared history of many of the Centre Users in a number of different campaigns and activities. The increasing divisions within the Movement together with the threat to the continued existence of the Centre tended to focus discussions at the Collective meetings upon strategies for maintaining the survival of the Centre as a destructive but non-aligned feminist community. This was the primary issue at a pragmatic level throughout the period of fieldwork. The division of labour and decision making processes at the Centre were generally treated as relatively insignificant at that particular moment of the Centre’s career.

The long-term association of several of the women attending the Collective meetings, and in particular of the four women to whom I refer as the ‘Core Collective’ also contributed to the relatively unproblematic achievement of a working consensus at Collective meetings. These women, as noted earlier, tended to liaise with each other by telephone or in meetings outside the Centre; many of the causes of action proposed at the meetings (regarding the tactics to be adopted to maintain the Centre, for the most part) came from one of them, and in general they shared the same position - this may have been agreed in advance, or (perhaps because of their longterm
association) they frequently arrived at the same position without too much debate.

Discussions at Collective meetings tended to result in consensus at a very general level; those who did not take issue with a particular proposal were deemed to be in agreement. Individual interventions by women other than the Core Collective tended to be framed as questions regarding particular local Councillors or Council meetings, as offers to undertake one of the day to day tasks of running the Centre – arriving early to unlock the building on a particular evening or shopping for food, most frequently – or as information regarding news of other feminist organizations and campaigns.

The organisation of the Centre on a day to day basis was structured around a communal meal, usually served up between 7.00 and 8.00 p.m., prepared and cleared away by women who were attending a group that evening, again in practice by the same two or three women, usually well established members of group, who owned – or had use of – cars or bicycles.

The meals were taken, and meetings held, in the main hall of the building, and the meals were prepared in the kitchen adjacent to it. More than two-thirds of Riley House was boarded off by the Council, on the grounds that it was unsafe, although this was perceived by some women as a precaution against squatters. The Centre activities were concentrated in the main hall and one room on the first floor; the entrance hall was also used for jumble
sales, and all three were used when the Centre was made available for national conferences of feminist organizations.

The meals were followed by group meetings; the Women's Therapy Group assembled on the first floor. The feminist socialist group, and other informal groups of women met in the large main room, to which local women were also directed by notices in the entrance hall.

When the Centre was first established, two or three women were 'on duty' on a rota system to provide advice, information or just tea, coffee and company for local women during the day. After three months, this practice was discontinued, partly because relatively few women used the Centre in the day time, and partly because, in the absence of other volunteers, the half dozen women sharing the day-time 'job' refused to continue. Again, the division of labour was not as 'egalitarian' as feminist principles required.

The organisation of time and space at the Centre was structured by the constraints on the women primarily involved in 'running the Centre'; the amount of time required to keep it open for other women, and to keep it clean and stocked with tea, coffee, and drinks and snacks for children who accompanied their mothers, in addition to the time required for their own domestic and occupational tasks. Time was a scarce resource at the Centre, particularly in the daytime, and considerations of time determined how much of the space potentially available at
Riley House was used. This is pursued in 6.4.

Time functioned at the Centre not only as a social resource, but in terms of duration and genealogy. Women who had belonged to the Belsize Park Collective were assigned greater prestige than those who 'joined' the Centre at Riley House; their prestige and authority derived partly from their longer involvement in the Women’s Centre, and the knowledge and experience which it produced, but also to their role as ‘initiators and activists’ of women’s liberation and the women’s movement, in Mitchell and Oakley’s phrase (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986, p. 1). Acquaintance with the ‘older generation’ of feminism (as distinct from women of an older generation) was a source of prestige among Centre users.

These women, who attended Collective meetings, and two of whom participated in the ‘Core’ Collective and the socialist-feminist group, were associated with the historical events of the late nineteen sixties, and perceived as ancestresses of the contemporary movement. They represented for the other women both historical figures and the progenitrices of contemporary feminism for some of the women who came to Riley House without a history of involvement in women’s movement politics.

The social composition of the Women’s Centre may be described, in general terms, as female, young, - with chronological ages ranging from 20 to late 30s - and white. The majority of women were single, although several co-habited with men, and a minority were mothers.
Many were employed in the public sector in a professional capacity; three were social workers or community workers, two were academics, one was a trade union official and one worked for a national charity. Several were students. The women with children tended to be divorced - there were only two married women with children who attended regularly - and some of these were employed on a part-time and casual basis, two of them in clerical capacity. Several more were unemployed and claiming social benefits. The distribution of women with children among the different groups favoured the Women's Therapy group. The consciousness-raising group, who were all mothers, withdrew from the Centre before the period of fieldwork. This is interesting in view of the central place assigned to women as wives and mothers by the women's movement in general, and by the socialist feminists at the Centre who had a discussion group on 'the family' and is pursued in Chapter 6 in relation to the perceptions by different Centre users, and by women who no longer attended the Centre, of the various groups and their functions.

Questions of women and class, the problems of assigning social class to women on an objective basis, and of the criteria employed in the subjective assignment and self-assignment of social class positions have been the subject of heated debate (Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; West, 1986; Abbott and Sapsford, 1987) and are addressed in Chapter 4. One pertinent fact in relation to social class to be noted here is that none of the features normally associated with
social class - occupation, income, family of origin, education, residence, material consumption - appeared directly related to the social interactions and intersubjective relations at the Centre. Rather, the version of feminism and politics espoused by a particular women, her rating as a 'friend' and her social age and status as a mother or non-mother emerged as primary factors.

Routes to the women's movement and the Women's Centre via shared social locations and cultural milieux, whether these were the intellectual field, the related (but not co-terminus) field of new left political culture, or domesticity, childcare and collective consumption were the factors which related to the social and interpersonal relations between women, both within groups and between groups. These did not determine the patterns of social relations at the Centre, which themselves changed overtime, but were clearly co-relates in many cases.

Passage through the same concrete social locations of interaction and cultural milieux, as well as a particular feminist identity therefore contributed to the informal relations at the Women's Centre. Similarly, the differential involvement of individuals and groups in the women's movement in its earlier manifestations and contemporary diverse forms were relevant to the processes and practices in play at the Centre. Before moving on to examine in more detail the relations between the Centre, the women's movement and the wider feminist formation in 2.2 and 2.3, however, some general points need to be made
regarding the position of the Centre vis-à-vis the local community.

The Centre and the local community

The relations between the Centre and the local community were both ambiguous and ambivalent. The physical location of the Centre, despite its brief to serve 'local women', was not a primary factor for the women who used it. The founding Collective had initially requested a site in Camden Town 'in the centre of the borough', with its high proportion of working-class residents and public housing. Riley House, in the North West of the borough was located at the edge of Belsize Park, traditionally an area inhabited by students in protected private sector rented accommodation, but with a fast increasing proportion of home ownership throughout the nineteen seventies, and close to Hampstead Village, designated a 'middle-class' area, albeit with radical traditions.

Few women who used the Centre regularly lived in Belsize Park; none lived in Hampstead. Many women came to the Riley House Centre from other Centres, either the Kingsgate Centre on the western border of the borough, or from one in Islington, as well as from the original Belsize Park Centre.

Physical geography had a negative function in determining the use of the Riley House Centre, rather than
a positive one; if it was too far from a woman’s home or workplace, she could not attend regularly. If it was within reach, most women based their decisions of whether or not to attend it on grounds other than proximity and ease of access, whether on foot, by public transport or by car or bicycle. Localism was not apparently a relevant factor in determining the development of an on-going Centre community. The political geography of the local community, defined in terms of local government was however a significant factor.

Camden Council had a ‘progressive’ political reputation, with several councillors subjected to a personal surcharge for failing to limit public spending. It had provided resources for one of the first Women’s Refuges in the country, and had provided sites for Women’s Centres at three other sites, apart from Riley House. It is argued in Chapters 5 and 7 that the politics of local government rather than any correspondence between patterns of social relations and residence patterns underpinned the relations between the Centre and local community.

Relations with local government were ambivalent. On the one hand, it was the provider of resources for the Centre and on the other hand it constituted for feminists a representative of ‘the system’. It was perceived as the local agent of the patriarchal, bureaucratic capitalist state which feminism was aiming to transform.

In terms of symbolic space, the Centre was located on the interface of the public and private domains. Provided
with a site in a short-life property by the Leisure Services Committee of the local Council which had formerly been a nursing home, it was established outside the sphere of domesticity, neighbourhood and small friendship groups which characterise the private domain of women. The Centre was perceived by the women using it as firmly in the public sphere. As one woman put it; 

"I don’t think you can have a Women’s Centre in someone’s house. People’s houses are totally privatized. You wait ’til you’re offered tea. One of the reasons people were against people living here is the fact that the Kingsgate Centre did have people there and they took it over. It became their house".

The public character of the Centre was thus viewed by most Centre users at least, as providing a more egalitarian organization than other Centres in the Borough such as the one cited where there was a residential commune, and was opposed to the private sphere of ‘home’. In fact, one woman did live in the caretaker’s flat at Riley House —‘unsalaried, of course’ — but this was to fulfil a condition imposed by the Council rather than one proposed by the Centre Collective.

At another level, the Centre can be located in the ‘third sector’ or the ‘intermediate sphere’, the sphere of ‘community’ of voluntary services and ‘subcultures of self-help’ (Rowbotham, 1986); outside the market system and the formal political system, but equally distinct from the domestic domain of ‘private life’.

The location of the Centre in the ‘intermediate’ sphere is complicated however by the central principle of
feminism which underpinned the practices and social relations at the Centre; 'the personal is political'. The slogan encapsulates the challenge to the boundary between the public and the private spheres and their gender organization which was basic to feminist theory and practice. For feminists, 'egalitarian' as well as 'liberatory', to adopt Freeman's classification (Freeman, 1979, p. 17), the oppression of women occurred as much in the informal, personal relations of private and community life as in the public sphere.

Feminist strategy was based on the personal experiences which women shared across the whole range of social interactions in which they participated, and all were viewed as implicated in sexual politics. Distinctions between public and private, and thus the existence of an 'intermediate' sphere were viewed as constructions designed to keep women in their place and as objects of struggle.

In view of the Centre users' perceptions of the public/private distinction the relations between the Centre and the local community are best viewed in terms of social, political and moral geography, rather than physical locality or the public/private distinction. The questions of spatial organization in its gendered social, political and moral dimensions, is addressed in detail in Chapter 5. The point here is that the Centre did not fit unambiguously into the local community in terms of neighbourhood, local government, or the traditional
classification of the public and private domains. The relations with local government and the organization of social, physical and symbolic space need to be investigated.

In summary, the Centre was characterized by a history of different physical locations and the prospect of another one, a fluid social composition, and complex sets of relations with the local community (the definition of which is left open at this point), the women's movement, and the wider formation of contemporary feminism. The Centre did not constitute a stable or unitary entity; it was continually in process. The relations, values and practices which distinguished it from other feminist groupings also linked it in to the social field of the women's movement and a variety of other social locations and cultural milieux.

The absence of any clearly demarcated symbolic boundary persisting over time at the Centre and the flow of individual feminists across that boundary requires the detailed analysis of the movement which encompassed it and in which Centre users participated in different ways. This analysis is pursued in 2.2 and 2.3. In the final section of the Chapter, I return to the question of the shared sense of community at the Centre.
2.2 Feminism and the women's movement: questions of identity and difference.

As noted in 2.1 the Centre Collective was granted the use of Riley House as a venue devoted to women-only cultural pursuits and the provision of advice and information for local women regarding their social, legal and political rights. Access to the Centre on a regular basis, however, was specifically restricted by the Centre Collective to 'feminists' only. The definition of a feminist was presented as self-evident and never explicitly discussed by Centre users. However, in practice inclusion in the Women's Centre involved the attribution of a specific type of feminist identity. The arrogation of the title 'feminist' by a particular group, or its widespread designation by other feminists groupings as feminist did not in itself ensure inclusion in the Centre community of identification or regular access to the Centre.

The use of Centre was, for example, explicitly denied to two Collectives both, widely acknowledged as feminist. These were the Wages of Housework Collective and the English Collective of Prostitutes, discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 7. Further, the consciousness raising group which had supported the establishment of the Centre at Riley House reacted against the presence of women claiming to represent 'radical feminism' at a Centre Collective meeting by withdrawing from the Women's Centre.

The above examples demonstrate the extent to which the
category of feminism was subjected to constant negotiation and re-negotiation by Centre users. Indeed, this process of negotiation was central to the construction and maintenance of the boundaries of the Women's Centre. The demarcation and policing of boundaries was an important feature in the emergence of a distinctive feminist community of identification at Riley House, which from now on will be referred to as the Centre community. The use of the term 'community' here indicates the existence of a specific feminist sense of identity, distinguished from feminist Others. The term 'Other' or 'Others' is used in this thesis to indicate a group or institution in opposition to which a particular group defines itself. A group, or a category of individuals, can define themselves as different from others, and usually focuses on one or more of these as significant differences. The point at which these differences, or a particular difference, are perceived as in opposition to the group and constituted as antipathetic to it marks the construction of otherness.

This community, with a fluid social composition, permeable boundaries, and changing basis of collective identification cannot be addressed as a fixed and stable entity. Rather, the characteristic features of community are taken to be (1) a subjective sense of belonging (2) a distinctive and differentiated cultural identity and (3) a degree of social closure and these emerged most clearly at particular points in the life cycle of the Women's Centre when its identity was perceived as
threatened. The threat to the distinctive identity of the Centre community was greatest when the local council reclaimed Riley House for redevelopment and proposed that the Riley House Centre users share a site with another Women's Centre already established elsewhere in the borough.

The threat to Centre identity in this case was not perceived by Centre users in terms of the loss of the physical site, but in terms of incorporation with, or more specifically subsumption by, two particular feminist groupings. These were themselves perceived in this context not as different and comparable feminist groups, or manifestations of the movement, but as Other.

The Riley House Centre community both restricted access to feminists and defined itself as a distinctive feminist community in opposition to significant feminist Others. The processes whereby a distinctive community of identification was achieved by the Centre occurred in the context of a wider field of feminist practice. This was constituted by social networks and a set of cultural codes and competences which were held in common by both the Centre users and other feminists (including those constructed by Centre users as Other), and structured in relation to the women's movement.

The analysis of the Women's Centre as a specific feminist community is further complicated by the identification of Women's Centre with the woman's movement, and the diversity of the movement itself. As
noted in the Introduction, Women’s Centres are routinely classified in feminist and academic literature as ‘manifestations of the woman’s movement’ (Dalerup, 1986; Bouchier, 1983). Initially, this appears an adequate way of framing the Women’s Centre at Riley House. The origins of the Centre in a women’s liberation group formed at the time of the institutionalisation of the women’s liberation movement in 1970 indicate clear links with the movement. Further, the organisational structure of the Centre is clearly based on the terms developed and communicated by women’s liberation groups specifying non-hierarchical and non-centralised organisation based on the participation rather than representation. In fact, however, the unproblematic identification of the Centre with the movement made by most commentators raises both conceptual and empirical problems.

Membership of the women’s movement was never - is never - formally assigned. Joining the movement was assumed to arise from active participation in any movement group or organisation (Oakley, 1987).¹ This immediately raises a logical problem. If access to the Women’s Centre as one manifestation of the movement is predicated upon ‘being a feminist’, and feminism itself is identified with the movement, then no women who is not already participating

¹ This definition of ‘joining’ the movement is different from the American ones. In these, the social dimension of the women’s movement is not necessary for the determination of membership. Robin Morgan provides a definition which is characteristic of the American approach: "the Movement" ... exists in your mind and in the personal and political insights that you can contribute to change and shape and help its growth" (Morgan, 1970, p. 14).
in the movement could ever qualify as a feminist. No women would therefore be eligible for inclusion in the Centre. Empirically, this is clearly not the case.

Many women using the Centre had not previously participated in a feminist group or organisation but were permitted regular access to the Centre, identified with the Centre community and recognised as part of that community by other Centre users. Further, several Centre users, particularly those in the Women's Therapy Group, explicitly distanced themselves from groups and individuals which they named as representative of particular sections of the women's movement. Similarly, the consciousness-raising group which withdraw from the Centre specifically cited the group claiming a 'radical feminist' identity as an example of 'what's wrong with the Women's Movement'. The necessity for some form of distinction between feminism and the women's movement is evident on both empirical and conceptual grounds.

The following section provides a baseline definition of feminism and a review of questions of identity and difference within feminist milieux and the women's movement. It then locates the Centre in relation to three analytically distinct, but empirically overlapping, formations of feminism:

1. A discursive formation characterised as an imagined community of feminism to which all women in principle have access via networks of communication.
(2) The women's movement, defined in terms of participation and collective action, manifested in a wide range of heterogeneous groups and organisations and capable of accommodating difference.

(3) The 'Women's Movement' characterised by competing claims by named groupings to represent 'true' feminism marked by division and functioning as a vehicle for 'women's politics'.

Finally, it marks out forms of knowledge and cultural performances specific to the Riley House Centre community and traces their derivation from, and extension to, these three formations of feminism.

1) Feminism as a discursive formation

The issue of what constitutes feminism, upon whom the term 'feminist' was bestowed and to whom it was denied by Centre users, is central to the ethnography of the Women's Centre, with the designation 'feminist' signalling potential inclusion and its denial marking exclusion. The negotiation and renegotiation of feminist positions and the meaning of feminism was continually in process at the Centre itself and at other venues. These included national conferences of the Women's Liberation Movement, socialist feminist conferences, feminist campaign groups and cultural milieux such as the Women's Arts Alliance.
Initially, it is useful to note the widely agreed baseline definition of feminism in which feminism is held to be organised around a viewpoint which holds that women are oppressed by virtue of their sex and that some action is required to combat this (Banks, 1976; Radcliffe-Richards, 1980; Jagger, 1983; Grimshaw, 1986).

This selection of a viewpoint, rather than a specific pattern of beliefs, practices and lifestyle, as the basis of a definition of feminism is significant. Centre users and other feminists who based their definition of feminism on specific patterns of belief, practice and lifestyle, tended to take these patterns as indicative of a 'true' version of feminism, that is, one with which they personally identified. The adoption of this definitional criterion would therefore involve the adoption of the classification system of just one or other of the feminist groupings and would obscure the ways in which the use of the term 'feminism' actually functions to signal identity, difference and otherness.

The adoption of this baseline definition does not, however, imply that it constitutes a consensual version of feminism which all 'reasonable' people may come to accept as Radcliffe-Richards (1980) has argued. On the contrary, it does not follow from the definition that any consensus is available regarding the forms of oppression to which women are subjected or how they should be remedied. Further, a general consensual version of feminism which is supposed to be attractive to all 'reasonable' people -
including men - will either be empty or it will support a particular point of view, as political as any other, under the guise of a neutral or uncommitted 'reasonableness'.

Rather than signifying a consensual version of feminism, this definition is broad enough to encompass a range of diverse views. For feminist historians, it has permitted the construction of an extensive genealogy of feminism, conferring upon the most recent forms of feminism a history and ancestry which provides them with roots and respectability (Banks, 1976; Delmar, 1986). Nevertheless, the specific forms of feminism which were in existence in the nineteen seventies and mobilised at the Women’s Centre during the period of fieldwork, have to be viewed in relation to their particular historical, social and political context. In particular, feminism has to be seen in relation to women’s liberation and the women’s movement.

The emergence of the women’s liberation movement and of the women’s movement which succeeded and to some extent subsumed it, is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Here, two features of contemporary feminist practice are taken to be central to definitions of feminism and the women’s movement available to Centre users, and the contradictions and confusions which characterise them. These features are firstly, the feminist assumption of a potential identity, subjectively experienced, between all women regardless of social differences and secondly, the assumption by many feminists of an identity between
feminism and the women's movement.

The assumption of a potential identity between all women needs to be contextualised in relation to the emergence of the women's liberation movement. Women's liberation pitched its appeal at a very high level of generality, addressing all women and assuming a potential unitary point of view on women's issues, one that would accommodate divergences rather than be submerged by them. The movement organised on the basis of a potential 'unity in diversity' (Wilson, 1986; Delmar, 1972; Coote and Campbell, 1983). This notion of identity rested on the idea that all women share certain experiences, experiences derived from external structures, legal, financial, political and social, which produce shared subjective responses in the form of feelings of personal adequacy and a sense of narrow horizons (Shrew, 1970). The slogan 'The personal is political' encapsulates this idea (among others).

Initially, this potential identity of women was taken to be unproblematic. This is evident in the regular adoption of the plural form 'we' in speech and texts - 'We' women can speak and write on behalf of all women. This form of speech and writing was employed regularly throughout the nineteen seventies, partly as an expression of this potential identity and partly as an attempt to mobilise solidarity between women on the basis of their shared structural position (that is, 'sisterhood'). It also functioned, however, in a third way, as a means of
asserting authority for a particular position by annexing to the 'I' of the speaker the 'we' of 'an indistinct globality of other persons', Benveniste's category of the 'Dilated I' (Benveniste, 1966, p. 235).

These three uses of the term 'we' - to express the potential identity of all women, to convert this into solidarity, and to claim authority for a particular viewpoint by indicating broad but unspecified support - indicate contradictions inherent in women's liberation and the women's movement throughout this period. On the one hand, the movement made a general categorical appeal to women as women, and therefore as potential active participants in the movement ('sisters'), while on the other hand, a significant number of movement activists also focused upon division rather than an accommodation of difference. They exhibited an exclusivism in internal movement practices through particular forms of language use and particular modes of self presentation.

These contradictions arose from the widespread tendency among initiators and activists of the movement to identify feminism in its broadest sense with the movement in a particularistic but usually unspecified sense. This tendency developed into a corresponding and persistent tendency for feminists from different 'moments' or 'conversations' of feminist practice to produce different named versions of feminism which were each identified by their protagonists with the women's movement itself. Haraway has neatly termed this process 'the production of
hierarchical taxonomies' of the movement which in turn makes a particular feminist viewpoint appear to be the telos of the whole (Haraway, 1990, pp. 196-7).

Haraway argues that these taxonomies function to rewrite feminist history - or at least the history of contemporary feminism - as an ideological struggle between specific named, coherent types of feminism. These were - and are still - labelled liberal, radical, revolutionary and socialist feminism and organized in such a way that the women's movement is defined in terms of one type and all other feminist terms and practices are either incorporated or marginalised (ibid., p. 198). In everyday practice this process of taxonomising the movement resulted in a state of affairs which Delmar describes as 'a sort of sclerosis of the movement, ... segments of which have hardened against each other' (Delmar, 1986, p. 9).

Each segment or typical unit of the movement produced in this way lays a privileged claim to the same name, 'feminism'. Nevertheless, Delmar proceeds to argue that all feminism is seen by feminists as a social movement for change in the position of women and that its privileged form is taken to be 'the political movement', defined as the self-organisation of women's politics. In her view this is 'part of the self-image of contemporary feminism' (Delmar, 1986, p. 11). This argument raises questions of the extent to which this 'self image' is shared by individual feminists. It was not shared in any simple way
by the Centre users.

At the Women's Centre clear distinctions were made between negative and positive perceptions of the women's movement. On the one hand, it was viewed by Centre users as a political vehicle for the articulation of feminism by particular named groupings claiming a privileged position and issuing lists of permissions and proscriptions. On the other hand, the movement was seen in ideal terms as the shared home of a diversity of women claiming a feminist identity, a site of mutual recognition and support and a base for collective action.

Viv, a member of the Women's Therapy Group, claimed that there was a necessity to maintain the Women's Centre as 'a base for movement women, and I don't mean Movement Women with capitals'. This distinction was immediately recognised and agreed with by all the other women involved in the discussion in which this comment was made, and has been adopted in this thesis. This suggests that the speaker and other group members align feminism with the women's movement in its broadest sense and oppose it to the capitalised Women's Movement. The latter was perceived by the Women's Therapy Group as a particular political manifestation of feminism, a site of doctrine and division occupied by a specific grouping regularly referred to as 'Movement Women' from whom they explicitly distanced themselves. This group of Centre users clearly did not acknowledge this Movement as the privileged form of feminism.
The positing of an identity between feminism and the women's movement does not therefore constitute a useful analytical procedure in the ethnography of the Women's Centre. In order to analyse the terms on which inclusion in the Centre was negotiated, and the tensions between the positive and negative perceptions of the movement by Centre users, more precise distinctions need to be made between feminism and the movement.

To begin with, the baseline definition of feminism needs to be qualified in three ways in order to specify the particular form in which, it is argued in Chapter 3, feminism has been realised as a 'generational entelechy' over the nineteen sixties and seventies. The three historically specific features of contemporary feminism are:

(i) **the development of the feminist discourse**, recognisable by specific forms of language use and the avoidance of certain other forms of language use which are general in the wider speech community: and underpinned by particular forms of social interaction:

(ii) **an imagined community of feminism** providing the basis for collective identification by individual feminists with their 'sisters':

(iii) **the centrality of the slogan 'the personal is political'** and its implications for a re-conceptualised and re-situated version of politics and challenges to the truth claims of scientific and theoretical 'objective' knowledge.
The development of feminist discourse

In the context of the Women's Centre it is not sufficient to define feminism as a viewpoint only; the way in which the viewpoint is articulated, and the way that women who articulate a feminist identity come to recognise and identify with each other, are both key elements in a definition of feminism as it existed during the period of fieldwork.

To qualify for inclusion in the Women's Centre, a woman was required not only to share the viewpoint noted above, but to demonstrate certain codes and competences which signal clearly to the Centre users that she did indeed share it, and shared it on their terms. The most important of these was verbal competence. Anyone claiming to be a feminist was expected to avoid particular forms of language use. The most important of these are the generic use of the term 'man' to include women, gender marked terms which exclude or marginalise women, such as 'chairman', or 'workman' and referents or appellations that construct women as sexualised, objectified or devalued, including such terms as 'chicks', 'girls', 'old maids', 'old wives' and, interestingly, 'ladies', with its connotations of class based distinction between women. Feminists were recognised as such by other feminists initially by their avoidance of all popular forms of language use which signalled the subordination, sexualisation, trivialisation or exclusion of women.
This avoidance of particular forms of language use indicates more than a shared viewpoint. It also indicates familiarity with shared domains of language use. On this basis, feminism has to be defined not only as a viewpoint but as a discursive formation, where a discourse is defined as 'a domain of language use, a way of speaking, writing and thinking' (Belsey, 1980, p. 37). Knowledge of a particular discourse is a prior condition for participation in a particular discursive formation, where a discursive formation is defined as constituted by the social use of a shared discourse.

In its discursive dimension, the feminist formation can be defined as a shared domain of language use, with characteristics similar to those specified by Raymond Williams and noted in 2.1 in his definition of an intellectual formation. (Williams, 1977, p. 116). The feminist formation however is markedly not restricted to the intellectual and artistic fields as traditionally conceptualised. Rather, the shared domain of language use manifest in particular ways of writing, speaking and thinking about sex, sexuality and gender emerges in a wide range of cultural spaces, constituting a developing and shared frame of representation and interpretation, rather than an intellectual movement in the narrow sense. The discursive formation does not consist in a single, unified and bounded discourse but constitutes a domain in which firstly, the category 'women' provides a privileged focus, secondly gender constitutes a primary category of
organization and thirdly sexual politics is the ground of discursive strategy.

This definition of feminism as a discursive formation means that a shared viewpoint on the position of women has to be organised and articulated through specific discursive practices in order for a woman holding this viewpoint to be socially recognised as eligible for inclusion in the Centre. Just as it was not sufficient to be a woman to gain access to the Women’s Centre on a regular basis, so it was not a sufficient criterion for inclusion in the Centre community merely to share a feminism viewpoint. In order to gain access to the Centre community a woman would have to demonstrate her knowledge of feminist discourse and its social use.

The importance of knowledge of the shared discourse as a means of achieving recognition as a feminist emerged clearly at one Centre Collective meeting. On this occasion, a woman arrived at the beginning of the meeting, held in the main hall of Riley House, and asked ‘Who’s the Chairman?’ She was greeted by one of the Collective who led her to sit by the fireplace in the wall of the righthand wall of the room, where women who came to ask for advice or information were always seated. In other words she was assigned the status of a client on the basis of one speech act. Her use of the term ‘Chairman’ with its male referent was sufficient to indicate to the Collective that she was not eligible for inclusion in the meeting. She did not qualify as a feminist, a potential
Centre user. It emerged in the course of the conversation that the woman 'just wanted to see what the Centre's like' and she was returned to the meeting in the main body of the hall. She remained on the margins of the meeting, not speaking. She did not return.

This incident exemplifies the way in which the lack of a particular form of knowledge - the knowledge of feminist language use - functions as a marker of exclusion. It also illustrates a form of 'insider' knowledge to which I shall return in 2.3, the knowledge of the social and symbolic functions of the spatial organisation of Riley House.

The emphasis upon a feminist discursive formation does not imply that there is one single speech community, textual community or intellectual community of feminism. Differences and divisions among feminists are regularly signified by differences of language use and incidents of this are examined in detail in Chapters 4 and 7. It does, however, locate the broadly defined and widely shared viewpoint, cited as the baseline definition of feminism, in a set of language practices that constitute the minimal criteria of recognition as a feminist by Centre users.

The term 'discourse' implies more than the use or avoidance of certain lexical items, such as those listed above. The definition of discourse as including 'ways of thinking', as well as ways of speaking and writing, refers to distinct sets of relations between a concept and its apparent referent (Marks and de Courtivron, 1979, p. 1).
Within dominant discourses women traditionally occupy different and, on occasion, conflicting positions. For example, in formal political discourse of the liberal democratic variant, women are positioned as citizens, implying rationality and equality. In psychological discourses, however, and indeed in popular discourses of everyday life, women are positioned as intuitive and irrational in opposition to men. The adoption of a feminist discourse, positioning women as rational and equal (in capacity, if not in rights) constitutes one of the characteristic features of modern feminism and is central to contemporary feminist struggles to remedy the oppression of women.

The 'ways of thinking', structured through discourse, are also inscribed in practice. The term 'discursive practice' refers to the social and material relations underpinning particular discourses as well as to specific forms of language use and specific discursive positions. The case of the visitor to the Women's Centre who asked for 'the Chairman' reveals not just a speech act which signals a lack of knowledge of feminist language use but also reveals the assumption of a particular form of social organisation which signifies a formal bureaucratic and 'patriarchal' form of social interaction, and which was vehemently opposed by feminists.

Knowledge of feminist discourse and the basic linguistic codes and competences required for inclusion 'as a feminist' was available from a range of contexts.
outside the Centre. Indeed, it was (and is still) available even outside the social and cultural milieux of recognised feminists. The single most important means by which feminists other than those on the social networks of the initiators and activists came to participate in feminist discourse is that of print communications.

A surprising number of women at the Centre said that they had 'heard about' the women's movement and feminism through books and articles. Their first knowledge of the ground rules of feminist discourse and forms of social organisation derives from print commodities. The function of print communications in diffusing and reworking feminist discourse is addressed in detail in Chapter 5. The point at issue here is that access to feminist discourse was available through the 'mediated' network of print communications, rather than through participation in feminist groups and events organised by the movement and their social networks. Feminism, in its broadest definition as a discursive formation, does not necessarily involve participation or social interaction. It does however involve a mediated social dimension which I term participation in an imagined community of feminism.

ii) The imagined community of feminism

The discursive formation of feminism is constituted through the medium of print communication as an imagined community. The concept of 'imagined community' is one
which derives from Benedict Anderson’s analysis of the origins of nations and nationalism (Anderson, 1983) which in turn draws on Elizabeth Eisenstein’s studies of the role of the printing press in mobilising communities of dispersal (Eisenstein, 1979, 1983). Common to both writers is an emphasis upon the mass production and distribution of print as a commodity in the production of ‘an image of communion’ (Anderson, 1983, p. 23) among consumers of the same print products, and hence an approach to ‘community’ as a cultural artefact. On this basis shared access to a distinctive domain of language use via the print market constituted for many women both their first encounter with feminist discourses and the first point of identification with feminism.

The shared knowledge of a particular discourse, and knowledge that it is shared, has produced an ‘image of communion’ for large numbers of disparate and dispersed women, a focus for collective identification as well as a basis for personal identification.

There can be no personal identification without a collective dimension. A woman who is ‘speaking as a feminist’ implies the presence of a category of feminists, i.e. a feminist collectivity, albeit one composed of women she may never have met. Print communications, therefore, provide the means, the relevant competences, for a feminist to ‘recognise’ other women as feminists even when they are personally unknown to each other, and to identify with them.
Thus the imagined community of feminism constituted by means of the printed word is activated and reactivated by women in a wide range of social interactions. The participants in the imagined community are recognised on the basis of particular forms of language use and social interaction, (with which they are familiar through print), and the collective identification with feminism affirmed.

The issues arising from the formulation of the concept of feminism as an 'imagined community' are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The point I am stressing here in relation to the imagined community is that it was constituted by print communication. This underpinned the development of the feminist discursive formation and provided a basis for collective identification for those women who identified themselves as feminists even before they participated in feminist groups.

iii) The Personal is Political

The imagined community of feminism, and the discursive features diffused through print commodities which underpin it, are both structured by the central slogan of contemporary feminism, 'the personal is political'. The theme embodied in this slogan underpins the assertion of potential identity between all women which is discussed above, and which rests upon the premise that external structures are experienced by all women in similar ways. The 'sharing' and analysis of personal experience was
established as the central route to the 'new politics' of women's liberation. In the first women's liberation groups meetings as consciousness raising sessions in the late nineteen sixties, the adoption of a feminist viewpoint involved an emphasis upon the personal viewpoints of women rooted in experience (Rowbotham, 1972; Wandor, 1972).

From this viewpoint, gendered relations of domination and subordination are instantiated in women's experience of the relations and practices of everyday life, in interpersonal sexual and social relations in the private as well as the public domain. 'Patriarchy', conceptualised as the system whereby particular forms of women's subordination are secured and maintained, is claimed to function in personal relations as much as the impersonal relations of the public sphere. Any effort to change the position of women for the better involves a transformation of personal relations between men and women, between women and between men, as well as structural change.

This expansion of the arena of sexual politics beyond the traditional fora of political action, and the challenge to the boundary between the private and public spheres and to their gender organisation was not always explicitly articulated by individual feminists. It nevertheless informs all feminist discourse, albeit in different ways for different individuals and groupings.

The incorporation of the 'personal' into the
'political' in feminist discourse does not, however, imply a consensual feminist definition of the political. The referents of the terms 'politics' in feminist discourse varied considerably - and still do - from the cultural politics of everyday life to the arena of formal state politics. Nevertheless, even for liberal feminists, feminist politics always incorporates women as subjects as well as citizens, (Jagger, 1983) that is, the subjective experience of women, as well as their 'rights', is taken to be a political issue.

Similarly, the privileging of personal experience functions to undermine, to differing degrees, the truth claims of 'objective' forms of knowledge. Feminist discourse is marked by an uneasy relationship between 'experience-knowledge' and 'theoretical-knowledge' (Rowbotham, 1969, p. 5) with different feminists taking up different positions with regard to subjectivity and objectivity and their respective values in different discourses of knowledge. ¹ The baseline of personal knowledge is however always taken to be relevant in feminist discourse rather than bracketed off from 'serious' consideration.

The implications of the expansion of the notion of the political and the privileging of the category of subjectivity are discussed in relation to the history and

¹ These positions are reviewed in Sherman and Beck, 1979; Harding, 1986; Rose, 1986 in relation to the Social Sciences, philosophy and the sociology of knowledge.
organisation of the women’s movement discussed in Chapter 3. The point to stress here is that both feminist discourse and the imagined community of feminism are organised around the position that ‘the personal is political’.

In short, the discursive formation constituted the most encompassing community of feminism for Centre users and in principle, at least, the primary community of identification in the hierarchy of feminist communities in which a constellation of different feminist communities were ranked. The discursive formation of feminism is referred to from now on as the feminist formation.

2.2.2 The women’s movement

The second type of feminist formation distinguished here is that of the women’s movement, defined as a social movement capable of accommodating difference. Membership of the movement is constituted by participation in feminist groups which hold in common a broad objective of changing the social, cultural, political and economic positions of women, but which may not agree on the means for achieving their objective, or even specify their objective in any precise way (Oakley, 1984; Coote and Campbell, 1982).

The women’s movement therefore constitutes the social dimension of feminist formation, and the positive sense in which the women’s movement was perceived by Centre users
was synonymous with feminism. The 'privileged site' of the women's movement was not perceived by the women at the Centre as the 'political movement' as Delmar argues. Rather, the activities and campaigns in which particular groups were involved were privileged by their participants.

Empirically, the sites of the women's movement which were viewed as the most important by Centre users were multiple rather than single, and their relevance to sexual politics were defined and evaluated in different ways according to different groups. The premise of 'the personal is political' imbued all collective action and interaction undertaken by women participating in feminist groupings with a degree of relevance to sexual politics. Thus the mutual support offered by the consciousness-raising group members to each other as they changed their kinship positions from that of married woman to divorced woman, and dealt with the corresponding changes in their legal, financial and social positions, were perceived as being as politically relevant as participation in the Campaign for the Legal and Financial Independence for women. Lobbying against the Benyon Bill, a private members bill introduced in the House of Commons to restrict women's rights to abortion, was viewed by its participants as being as politically valid as lobbying for the Equal Pay Act, (which was passed in 1975).

This aspect of the women's movement both distinguishes it from the other 'new social movements' and raises
questions around its inclusion, on the basis of this definition, in the category of "new social movements" as defined, from a primarily sociological perspective, by Offe (1986; 1987), Castells (1983), Melucci (1980), Touraine (1971).

The following section reviews some of the issues which arise from definitions of the "new social movements" and which are pursued in more detail in Chapter 7. It then relates them to the structure and organization of the women's movement in terms of difference, division, and the mobilisation of significant Others within the movement.

Definitions of social movements are usually framed in terms of the relations between the groupings concerned and the political system. Gerlach and Hine propose a basic definition of a social movement as "a group of people with a purpose which will bring about change ... spreading in opposition to the established order in which it originated ... and operating through forms of power mobilised outside the power structure of a society and exerting pressure on that power structure" (Gerlach and Hine, 1970, p. iv).

The 'new' social movements - that is those which have been operating over the last three decades - are characterised, in the view of Offe (1986, 1987), Touraine (1981) and Lipset (1977) by their construction around anti-parliamentary platforms. Social movements are not by definition anti-parliamentary but, in Offe's terms, operate as "mobilizing centres for extra-parliamentary politics" (Offe, 1986, p. 26).
Offe characterises the new social movements as issue-oriented, negative and reactive, incapable of providing programmes or policies. ‘Movements can only survive by feeding upon events which trigger protest and mobilise large members of people. They typically survive by making ad hoc, negative, and simply formulated demands that ignore the complex connections to do with governmental policies’ (Offe, 1986, p. 27).

This approach, derived largely from the study of the ecological movement in Germany, is not a useful one for the analysis of the women’s movement, with its positively framed demands and a pro-active as well as a re-active dimension. In Castells’ view, the phenomena noted by Offe belong in the category of protest politics; ‘one-dimensional reactions’ which, ‘when they have developed an alternative global vision ... form a counter-culture’ (Castells, 1983, p. 326).

The widespread association or even identification, of social movements with counter-cultures and (largely unspecified) ‘radical politics’ with its anti-parliamentarian connotations (Williams, 1976, p. 251) is a frequent occurrence in academic literature. Lipset, for example, focuses his discussion of ‘tactics and movements’ around ‘moralistic radical minorities who have often secured the support or acquiescence of the more moderate elements’ and presents them as characterised by ‘extreme actions’ (Lipset, 1977, p. 12). Martin presents the social movements as ‘offshoots’ of the Underground,
symptoms of transition, and disposes of the women's movement in three paragraphs, declaring it re-incorporated into institutional politics by the mid nineteen seventies (Martin, 1981).

The identification of the 'new social movements' with radical politics, counter-cultures or the Underground serves to emphasize symbolic resistance (and its containment) rather than an active engagement with political structures. It appears to rest upon three features which initially seem common to both the social movements and the radical and counter-cultural configurations but which in fact function in significantly different ways in the new social movements. These are firstly, an anti-parliamentary or, in the analyses of Turner and Martin 'anti-structure' position (Turner, 1974; Martin, 1981); secondly, political symbolism and the deployment of the 'politics of the spectacle' and thirdly, identity politics.

With reference to the first point, in the case of the women's movement - and the women's liberation movement is addressed here as one current within the broader women's movement - many groups positioned themselves on an anti-parliamentary platform, taking the state and state politics at both national and local levels as an embodiment of patriarchy, the primary Other, and hence an object of struggle rather than a means to be employed in the struggle. This position is frequently identified with 'radical feminism', but as is discussed in detail in
Chapters 3 and 7, self-designated radical feminists often supported negotiations with local government representatives, even if they did not directly participate, and often vigorously campaigned for particular pieces of legislation.

Secondly, the focus upon ‘extreme actions’ refers in many cases to the symbolic dimensions of political action which are typically deployed by the new social movements and organized around the politics of the spectacle (Lipset, 1977; Martin, 1981). In the case of the women’s movement, these are often represented in terms of ‘bra-burning’ by American women in 1968 (Martin, 1981) (in fact, the ritual dumping of bras and girdles in rubbish bins) the disruption of the televised Miss World contest in 1969, the mobilisation of mass demonstrations for street theatre, the deployment of objects associated with ‘women’s work’ and ‘women’s place’, from prams, nappies, and saucepans, to diaphragms and sanitary towels, in public contexts in which they are ‘out of place’.

This form of political symbolism, challenging and disrupting dominant classification systems by introducing particular objects into different contexts where they are perceived, with some outrage, as anomalous, as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 1975), is particularly associated with the women’s movement and the Gay Liberation Movement. It does not of itself imply a negative or anti-parliamentarian position, or an exclusive reliance on symbolic resistance. Rather, it signifies the centrality
of cultural politics in these movements.

Cultural politics provide the focus of those definitions of social movements which stress the expressive as well as the instrumental or issue-oriented dimensions of the new social movements. In these definitions, ascriptive identity, in terms of gender, sexuality or race, is perceived as the key factor in cementing - at least temporarily - the heterogeneous social movement, and the expressive dimension is argued to be primary (Melucci, 1987; Castells, 1983).

The problems with taking ascriptive identity as unproblematic in the Women's Movement where struggles were - and frequently still are - organised around the achievement of a 'liberated' identity, rather than a celebration of ascribed identity, and the difficulties of disentangling the expressive and instrumental dimensions of the Women's Movement are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.¹ The point here is that rather than stressing 'issues' those definitions which focus on questions of identity, self-definition, and an expressive dimension articulated through cultural politics can distinguish between the strategic use of 'the politics of the spectacle' by a social movement and the symbolic resistance which comprises the defining characteristic of oppositional sub-cultures and counter-cultures (Clarke et

¹ It is also worth noting that the Black Power movement in the USA also aimed at the achievement of a liberated identity through collective action. The position of the 'Personal' was not foregrounded to the same extent, however, and was most notably not explicitly gendered. (Hooks, 1987)

Castells' approach to urban social movements is relevant to the Women's Movement, in so far as it differs from the issue-oriented approach of Offe and the countercultural, 'anti-structure' position of Martin and Turner. In Castells' definition, the focus is shifted from the immediate issues at stake in any particular set of demands to the underlying goals of the movement and its relations with both the formal power structure and society in its broadest sense. While his definition of urban social movements is organised around the struggle over the historical meanings of urban localities, and the cultural colonisation of particular territories (particularly in his analysis of the gay movement in San Francisco) (Castells, 1983) which does not apply directly to the women's movement, it is still a useful one.

Leaving aside his primary focus on urbanism, (where the urban is defined as the area of collective consumption), Castells' definitional criteria consist of i) a movement's consciousness of its role, ii) the articulation in its praxis of demands for collective consumption, community culture, and political self-management, iii) its 'connection ... to society' particularly through the mass media and political parties and iv) its connections to the political system, but with an organization and identity independent of any political party. (Castells, 1983, pp. 322-3).

These criteria obtain for the women's movement.
Firstly, from the establishment of the women’s liberation movement in 1970, its role in articulating feminist demands was evident, and the debates at each national conference to extend these demands from the first four to the final one agreed in 1978 indicated the consciousness of its participants of its role in both articulating and securing those demands.

Secondly, collective consumption was a key demand of the women’s movement, organised around gender. The provision of childcare, of equal opportunities, equal pay and services for the control of women’s reproductive capacity were all pitched at a collective level. As Cockburn argued however, consumption may best be framed, from a feminist perspective, as an aspect of social reproduction, and the local state plays a central part in its organisation (Cockburn, 1977).

In Cockburn’s view, and in the view of most feminists, the organisation of social reproduction - is a gendered activity, undertaken primarily by women on unequal terms with men, and is the pivot of community politics (Cockburn, 1977; Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1980; Rowbotham, 1986). These issues are addressed in detail in Chapter 5; the point here is that in the women’s movement collective consumption, social reproduction and the local community were perceived as inextricably linked.

Political self-management and autonomous organization and identity were also viewed as inter-twined with the ideal of "community culture", i.e. participation rather
than representation, reciprocal exchange rather than market transaction, face-to-face interpersonal relations rather than mediated social relations, which was accorded high value.

The movement also related to the wider society, particularly through print communications and the development of professional feminist groupings within higher education and the intelligentsia, the public sector, the trade unions and the political parties. Debates over the extent to which these linkages with social institutions and the formal political system constituted 'entryism' (a potentially useful political strategy) or 'co-option', (the process by which participation in social institutions and formal political apparatuses - constitute incorporation into 'the system') were heated, and are discussed in relation to Women's Centre in Chapters 6 and 7. Nevertheless, the links existed and indeed were of fundamental importance to the Centre users both in establishing the Centre and ensuring its survival.

On this basis, the women's movement may be classified as a 'new social movement' rather than viewed as an example of counter-cultures or an instance of protest politics, which are defined in terms of symbolic resistance and containment. However, the particular organization and structure of the women's movement, with its distinctive discursive formation and its central premise that 'the personal is political' differentiates it
in significant ways from the other movements usually conflated under the rubric of the 'new social movements' - the Black consciousness movement, urban social movements, the Gay Liberation movement and Green movements.

The women's movement has been defined as a constellation of small autonomous groups. In Wandor's definition, 'the pattern created by the small group moves from the individual to the group; from the group to the other small groups, and thus to the collective small groups which constitute the movement. It is a constantly moving pattern of atomic structures' (Wandor, 1972, p. 115). The function of the small group itself is 'to connect the inner and outer experience, to analyse it and to come to far reaching political concessions' (ibid.).

The links between the groups are generally referred to in feminist literature as 'networks', the activation of which, known as 'networking', is seen by participants as a central tactic in strategies of co-operation among women (Leghorn and Leghorn, 1981; Coote and Campbell, 1982; Rowland, 1984). The term 'networking' is used by these writers, as it was in the conversations of Centre users, in its active sense. The term 'network' is used generally by feminists as a metaphor for talking about interpersonal relations and oral communication, a route to collective action and solidarity and a circuit of exchange by which rumour, news and gossip circulate.

The movement was - and is - organised on the basis of participation rather than representation, with no formal
hierarchy and no 'leadership'. The only formal link between the autonomous small groups was the National Conference, the last of which was held in 1978, during the period of fieldwork. At the founding conference, a National Co-ordinating Committee was established but lapsed the following year.

In this context, participation in a group constitutes participation in a number of feminist social networks. Participation in the women's movement, then, supplements participation in the mediated network of feminist print communications; it provides the social dimension of the feminist formation. These social networks also constitute the basis of the women's movement.

As noted in 2.1, Centre users frequently participated in more than one group, and individual women distinguished between participating in collective action such as demonstrations, parliamentary lobbying, and lobbying the local council 'with friends' from participation 'as a group'. The first was not specified as a 'political' activity; the second was. Further, no individual could represent her group - the movement organized on the basis of participation rather than representation. It is argued in 3.4 that this structural feature of the movement and its transgression both functioned to produce division at a national level and paradoxically, to accommodate difference at the local level, within the Women's Centre.

In relation to the movement as a whole, however, the fact that women did not often participate 'as a group' or
as representatives of a group renders Wandor's definition of the movement inadequate.

Rather than a 'moving pattern' of small groups, the movement is best conceptualised as the social field of feminist networks, to which access is available through participation in groups, but of which the nodes are constituted by individual women.

**The women's movement as the social field of feminist networks**

This definition is useful for several reasons, not least because of the association of social networks with non-institutionalized relationships and community action, both related to an ideal type of community in early community studies (Bott, 1958; Wilmott and Young, 1957). In the Bethnal Green studies, community was defined in terms of informal egalitarian and reciprocal relations organized through social networks, based on locality and characterised by sentiment, with the family as the metonymic paradigm. The social network is presented in these studies as characterising the world of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood, and opposed to bureaucracy and the market.

These studies in fact obscured the relations of gender and power operative in the families and neighbourhoods concerned, but also functioned to promote the affective value of community, and to celebrate the role of women in
the community, to the extent that one review of these studies was headlined 'The Mother Goddesses of Bethnal Green' (Wilson, 1983, p. 24).

The deployment of community to signify a positive value, and the assignment of that value to social networks - or 'networking' - as the vehicle of informal, reciprocal and egalitarian social relations was adopted by the women's movement, as by other communitarian groupings. It was also developed specifically in relation to female psychology by feminist writers such as Gilligan and Chodorow (Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1976).

'Community' was adopted as a political ideal by the women's movement, and signified immediate, intimate and transparent personal relations to which women were thought to incline psychologically.¹ Community is thus identified as a positive affective feminine value and associated with feminist social networks.

The second characteristic of social networks which is relevant to the Women's movement is that they can function as social resources, providing systems of support and exchange. In addition to this, an individual's experience of culture and society is crucially mediated by their participation in these networks. Networks do not merely have social functions, they structure a world view. Participation in feminist social networks provides a route

¹ This signification has, as a small number of writers have noted, continually been contradicted in practice and caused frustration and discontent within the women's movement (Mulhern, 1984; Steedman, 1986; Young, 1990).
to a world of feminist meanings as well as social relations.

Social networks also constitute chains of informal, oral communication, Epstein's 'chains of gossip' (Epstein, 1969). In Epstein's view, information transmitted along a network binds it together. In the case of the women's movement, however, it both binds the individuals and groups participating in the network and extends beyond it, in relation to both sources and destination.

The Centre users mobilised the social networks of some of their number which derived from the social locations in which women's liberation emerged - as discussed in 3.2 - both as sources of information and as social resources in their negotiations with the local council. They also relayed information derived from, and representations and interpretations produced through, feminist social networks to other social actors in political parties and the New Left formation of political culture.

This relates to two further characteristics of social networks. The first is that social networks can be mobilised for different purposes, and in different ways in different contexts (Boswell, 1969). The second is that, in Barnes' phrase, 'a network has no limits or boundaries; it has no co-ordinating organization'. (Barnes, 1964, p. 43). In relation to the first characteristic, the negotiations with the council and the opposition to the proposed merger of the Women's Centre with the Kings Cross Centre provide examples of a situation where individuals
from one feminist organization - the Riley House Women’s Centre - transmitted sets of representations about other feminist groups at the Kings Cross Women’s Centre along different segments of a social network which extended beyond the boundaries of the Women’s Centre; one set of representations was for ‘insiders’ and one for ‘outsiders’.

The members of the Core Collective engaged in negotiations with the Council represented the Riley House and Kings Cross Collectives to the councillors as targeting different groups of local women and performing different functions, from the Riley House Collective, and argued that they could not be merged satisfactorily. Within the Centre itself, stories of the Kings Cross Collectives circulated which constructed them as Other - opposed to Riley House in style and ethos - rather than different, and produced a consensus that ‘We’re not going in with Them!’

The negotiations referred to here are examined in detail in Chapter 7; at this point, they illustrate the fact that the activation of networks beyond the Centre and the movement is directly relevant to both the Centre and the Movement, and secondly, that the ‘chains of gossip’ which characterise social networks can be differently mobilised to different effect. The informal communications network provided by social networks structured the women movement and the Women’s Centre, but not necessarily in any simple or unifying way (as
discussed in 2.3).

In summary, the women's movement is defined as the social field of feminist networks: a field with no centre, no clear units, no formal hierarchy and no clear boundaries, with individuals rather than groups functioning as the nodes of the network. Participation in the movement is constituted by active participation by women in a small group, but the structure and organization operates on the basis of social networks rather than small groups.

At the local level, the level of particular groups or Collectives, this structure and organizational form permitted both the emergence of distinctive group or collective identities, and the accommodation of some degree of difference, which were secured at the Women's Centre by strategic exclusions and permeable boundaries which permitted individual Centre users to participate in other groups on other sites which still identifying with the Centre in terms of their group participation at Riley House.

At the national level, however, the organizational structure permitted and, as argued in 3.4, promoted, division through the cutting of particular feminist social networks, the social closure of some groups, and the adoption of moral imperatives involving prescriptions and proscriptions, and the production of hierarchical taxonomies of feminism. This is the terrain of the Women's Movement.
The Women's Movement - with capitals

The divided and competing groups which each claimed to represent one feminist configuration as the true version and claimed to constitute the real women's movement can be conceptualised as the Women's Movement. The participants in a range of groups, usually claiming the titles 'radical feminist' or 'revolutionary feminists' were referred to by several Centre users as 'Movement Women with capitals'.

These groups claimed specific group identities, and invariably acted as groups, rather than as individual women who participated in a number of feminist groups, and claimed a primary identification with the encompassing community of the feminist formation. The social and cultural boundaries of the groups were clearly marked by styles of self presentation. The politics of appearance were higher on the agenda of these groups than of those of most groups.

In the early years of women's liberation there was a general moralistic element involved in most groups, with a good deal of disapproval for women who accepted their position in culture and society without reflection or rebellion which was orchestrated around discussion of the role of 'voluntarism' in the maintenance of women's subordination (Nava, 1983). Among most feminists, the focus shifted by the late nineteen-seventies to questions of 'socialization' or, following the publication of Juliet Mitchell's book Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) and the
dissemination of the psychoanalytic approach in *Spare Rib*, the movement's highest circulation magazine, to the role of the unconscious in securing submission to 'the Law of the Father'. For Movement Women, however, there remained the moral imperative of the voluntary rejection of established modes of feminine conduct, which was required to be signalled in codes of dress and self presentation—dungarees and jeans, socks and boots or heavy shoes, cropped hair, no use of cosmetics. (Wilson, 1987; Gamman and Young, 1988; Neustatter, 1989).

The rejection of feminine codes of dress and the adoption of very similar styles of self-presentation functioned in ways similar to subcultural codes, to mark both belonging and difference, to signal particular versions of feminism and their re-action against the parent-culture of feminism. (Clarke, 1981; Hebdige, 1979). As noted above, however, there was no unitary or stable cultural formation beyond the minimal codes and competences of the discursive formation which can be represented as a parent culture; further, most feminist groups perceived themselves as 'subcultures of mutual self-help' (Rowbotham, 1986, p. 72). A classification of groups of Movement Women as feminist subcultures is not a useful analytical procedure, therefore, despite the superficial similarities.

Rather, the Movement Women are best characterised first, by their adoption of positions opposed explicitly to other feminist configurations (on the basis of a moral
imperative) and their refusal to accept a continuum of difference and, secondly, by the fundamental importance of the group.

The sectarian features of the groups which constituted the Women’s Movement are familiar from a wide range of studies of religious sects (Wilson, 1961, 1971; Turner, 1969, 1974). The group participants perceived themselves both as select and the elect; they viewed their truth claims as unassailable. Patriarchy was in several cases perceived as embodied in individual men in social and political structures and in the politics of everyday life. All feminist politics were organized as separatist, that is, excluding all alliance with men, and on the basis of ‘no negotiation with the system’, articulated through the slogan ‘Beggars Can’t be Choosers’.

By the National Conference of 1977, one such grouping, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, pursued this position to its logical extreme, arguing for the adoption of lesbianism on political grounds and representing heterosexual women as ‘collaborators’ with ‘the enemy’ and beyond the pale of feminism (WIRES, 1979; Neustatter, 1989, p. 34). It was the presence of a group of political lesbians at a Women’s Centre Collective meeting which prompted the consciousness-raising group to withdraw, (although they never returned as a group) and the intervention of political lesbians and separatist feminists at the National Conference of 1978 which marked the end of the annual conferences and the formal demise
of the Women’s liberation movement. Most of the women participating in these groups were referred to as ‘radical feminists’, but, as in the case of the needs Group, not all the groups concerned claimed a ‘radical’ designation. Further, not all women who claimed a ‘radical’ identity adopted the organizational modes of the Movement Women, though almost all maintained a separatist line.

The Women’s Centre (and other local groupings) therefore continued to accommodate difference through a policy of non-alignment and the strategic exclusions which this involved. Inclusion in the Centre community was predicated on no primary allegiance to, or ‘alignment’ with any specific group. Centre users were required to demonstrate their commitment to the feminist formation and the women’s movement in their diversity rather than their espousal of any particular group position or ethos.

Individual Centre users designated themselves as socialist-feminist (particularly, of course, in the socialist-feminist discussion group) or radical feminist and some were lesbians, but their affiliation to a particular tendency was accommodated on an individual basis.

The divisions between radical and socialist feminisms, and the indifferent relations between different varieties of feminists and the social locations from which women’s liberation emerged are discussed in Chapter 3, while the various affiliations of different groups and individuals and their regulation at the Centre are examined in 6.4 and
Chapter 4. Here, the key point is that not all radical feminists were 'Movement Women', and the Women's Movement consisted of a relatively small number of groups at any given time. These groups, however, had a high media profile, and constituted news-value. The national press, particularly the tabloids, focused on them in much of their coverage of the women's movement throughout the seventies, and to that extent contributed to the construction of a hierarchical taxonomy of the movement for the public eye. This was achieved through the production of representations of the women's movement as consisting almost entirely of Movement Women, easily assimilable to existing categories of deviants and with clear links to the libertarian and situationist counter-cultures of the 'permissive sixties'.

An early example of this is provided by the press coverage of the Miss World demonstration of 1970. During the trial of the Women involved, the London daily press focused on a connection between women's liberation and the Angry Brigade, a terrorist organization. This connection was constructed from one of the leaflets which claimed 'We're not beautiful, we're not ugly, we're angry', and was represented in a front page headline as 'Angry Brigade Woos Women Militants' (Evening Standard, March 20th 1970).

To recapitulate, the Women's Movement was constituted by sectarian groups distinguished by their organisation as groups rather than as individual participants, with a primary allegiance to their specific version of feminism,
in the name of feminism itself. A series of selective and elective groups, it was organized around moral imperatives and unassailable truth-claims orchestrated in opposition to other feminist groupings. It was derived from the shared social field of feminist networks but 'Movement Women' eschewed networking in favour of closed groups and favoured rhetoric over interpersonal exchanges as a means of recruitment.

The Women's Movement on these terms cannot be identified with any one version of feminism, but has to be viewed as composed of a range of specific social and cultural forms and practices. It constituted a significant part of the context of the Women's Centre since it represented what most Centre users defined themselves against and provided the reason for the self-exclusion of one group of Centre users from Riley House. It was also a central factor in the fragmentation and demise of the formal Women's Liberation Movement.

2.3 The Women's Centre as a distinctive feminist community of identification within the women's movement.

The mobilisation of a distinctive feminist community of identification at the Women's Centre has therefore to be analysed in relation to the codes and competences of the feminist formation and to the specific social and cultural networks of practices and relations constituted by the
women's movement. The perception of Centre users of the Riley House Centre as but one of a constellation of feminist organizations and manifestations of the Women's movement on the one hand, and as different and distinctive on the other, rests upon the shared dimensions of feminist knowledges and the specific ways in which these were mobilized at the Centre. These latter forms of knowledge and the particular ways in which they were deployed, mark out the 'insiders' from the 'outsiders'. The boundaries of the Centre community were constructed and reconstructed in symbolic rather than structural terms, with an emphasis upon the particular cultural and symbolic performances by which basic feminist competences were realized in a particular social context.

The term 'knowledge' here encompasses both competences and performances. The specific performances by which particular feminist competences were enacted at the Centre may be seen as constituting a sub-category of Geerz's 'local knowledge' (Geerz, 1983) incorporating knowledge of the physical site of the Women's Centre and the social and symbolic functions of its spatial organisation, and knowledges derived from repeated and regular participation in social interactions at the Centre. These forms of local knowledge need to be distinguished from knowledge of the feminist discursive formation and participation in the social networks of the Women's movement, in other words, from knowledges derived from familiarity with the feminist terrain, which constitute, in terms of the geographical
metaphor, 'regional' knowledge.

The interaction of knowledge derived from sources external to the Centre and those generated or transmitted inside the Centre and contributing most centrally to the mutual recognition and identification of Centre users as 'insiders' are complex. Their functions in demarcating the boundaries of the Centre community and thereby intensifying the subjective community of identification were also variable. It was in response to particular events that the Centre users came to a primary identification with the Centre community, particularly the threat to that taken-for-granted, lived identity as a distinctive grouping which was contained in the Council’s decision to re-claim Riley House for re-development and their proposal to re-locate the Centre community in the Kings Cross Women’s Centre. It was these events which triggered the processes in which the identity of the Centre came to be perceived as vital to the women using it and its boundaries were clearly demarcated.

Three types of knowledge can be usefully specified in the context of the analysis of the mobilisation of the Centre community around a shared stock of knowledge, the shared meanings and values assigned to specific competences and performances and the shared interpretations of events. These can be listed as i) feminist competences which could be acquired through the mediated networks of the discursive formation; ii) forms of knowledge derived from participation in the
feminist social networks of the women’s movement and
iii) local ‘insider’ knowledge, derived from inter-
personal relations at the Centre. The second and third
forms of knowledge can be designated personal and
participatory; the first form is documentary knowledge,
that is, knowledge derived from print communications and
a range of other cultural documents, such as art works,
theatre and politics of the spectacle, from a spectator’s
point of view (Williams, 1981).

The content of each form of knowledge consists
primarily of the ground rules for social interaction,
including as noted in 2.1 and 2.2, verbal interaction. At
one level these interactional ground rules were derived
outside the Centre. Knowledge of the structure of Women’s
Movement groups, the rotation of tasks and the co-
operative basis of feminist organization, and the forms of
language-use was acquired by some Centre users from books
and articles, as discussed in 2.2 above. By others it was
acquired by attendance at other feminist events and
venues; seminars, workshops, consciousness-raising groups,
the Women’s Arts Alliance, the Women’s Research and
Resources Centre were all cited by Centre users as sites
in which they first participated in feminist social
interaction.

On the other hand, the ground rules governing the
rotation of specific tasks at the Centre such as shopping,
cooking, serving and cleaning away the communal meals
which preceded meetings, could only be acquired through
participation. Knowledge of the ways in which the rules were bent or broken, so that the four women referred to as the Core Collective tended to carry out these tasks regularly, also derived from regular participation. This form of personal knowledge of ‘who does what’ is also ‘insider’ knowledge, local knowledge. It not only conferred the status of a regular Centre user, a member of the Centre community, but it also distinguished Centre users from their feminist sisters who visited the Centre to mobilise support for particular campaigns or inform them of specific feminist events, as well as from the women visiting the Centre for information and advice - the women to whom I refer as ‘clients’.

The following section reviews particular forms of local knowledge of the personal and participatory variety, and traces their links with the social and documentary forms of knowledge with which they interacted to produce informal power structures at the Centre. Local knowledge was not equally distributed nor uniformly valued; particular forms of local knowledge, and their strategic deployment were more powerful than others.

The first type of local knowledge was personal knowledge of the individual women at the Centre; knowledge about their personal lives, political affiliations and particular capacities or - particularly in the case of the Women’s Therapy Group - particular problems. Personal knowledge of this kind was not confined to members of the same group, but extended in the case of some women to all
Centre users. When asked a specific question, several Centre users would reply 'Ask Kate, she knows all that'. The reply itself indicated knowledge of the 'who knows what' variety noted above, as well as acknowledging other levels of knowledge available to Kate.

The types of knowledge attributed to Kate and the three other members of the Core Collective consist of historical knowledge of the Centre based on long-term participation in the Centre Collective from its foundation on another site, and cross-boundary knowledge derived from participation in other movement groupings. This latter type of knowledge was shared by Centre users, and regularly relayed in conversation and story telling in particular ways which converted this cross-boundary form of knowledge to a distinctively 'insider' form.

Conversations at the communal meal and before or after meetings were often dominated by stories about particular events, told in personal terms; who was there, to whom a particular woman spoke, what she did or said. This constructed a particular shared account of the event in question, which would be relayed to other Centre users, with embellishments and references to other stories or bits of gossip which had circulated on earlier occasions. These stories would be re-activated by short-hand references which were not intelligible to women who were not participants in the chains of gossip and story telling linking the Centre users. These women may have known of the event concerned, and have been informed of certain
incidents and outcomes by other sources, but in terms of Centre stories, they were not 'in the know'.

Personal knowledge of this kind was also deployed to signify cross-boundary power in informal conversations. Some Centre users were not only more 'in the know' than others, but were also more selective in their choice of interlocutors, and signalled their own access to restricted knowledge. This was done by comments such as 'Oh, Helen was saying something about that at the Essex Road meeting, but I can't really speak for her here ...' and 'We heard something about it at Denise's, she was really angry. I expect she'll tell you herself when she's calmed down a bit'. Such comments alerted the other Centre users to the fact that the speaker knew the feelings of the women concerned, but was retaining that knowledge.

Practices of naming also worked to indicate both 'insider' knowledge and cross-boundary knowledge. They were used to both construct shared knowledge and to signify inclusion in other select groupings and access to restricted social relationships.

Centre users, like other feminists, generally knew each other by their first names only. The politics of naming in Britain involve the adoption by women of their father's or husband's family names, which for feminists signify not only patrilineal descent but patriarchy. Family names were not used in social interactions between Centre users for this reason, although they were noted together with
telephone number and address by a group member when new recruits joined.

The avoidance of patronyms also contributed to the development of an informal and intimate social milieux to which feminists aspired at most of their meetings. Paradoxically, however, knowledge of a Centre user's family name indicated a close and intimate relationship with that Centre user, a relationship extending outside the Centre. Alternatively, it indicated that the woman who knew the name was responsible for collating the contact telephone numbers and addresses for a group. In the first case, the knowledge indicates an intimate relationship of friendship; 'naming' here was frequently a form of 'name-dropping'. In the second case, it indicates that the woman with the knowledge plays an active organisational role, liaising between members of the group, and therefore closely involved with the Centre community.

A few Centre users referred regularly to feminists whose writings and political activities were well known through feminist publications and the circuits of review and interview in the mass media by means of which distinction is conferred upon particular spokespeople and writers. Despite the formal avoidance of structures of leadership, these women were tacitly regarded as the feminist establishment and attributed with authority to speak of feminism. Centre users who referred to these individuals by their first names, as 'Sheila' (or 'Juliet'
or 'Anna' ... implied an egalitarian relationship with them, and hence a comparable status for themselves.

In these cases, an interlocutor would frequently ask 'Sheila who?' and the reply 'Sheila Rowbotham' would confirm their personal familiarity with the well known feminist and signal an entrée to a restricted social grouping. On one occasion when such an exchange took place the interlocutor, unabashed, invited the sharing of this personal knowledge by responding 'Oh, what's she like?' The invitation was deflected, however, by the speaker pursuing the conversation in terms of the political position of the woman concerned, the knowledge of which was generally available through publications. By such means, personal relationships with women assigned prestige within the feminist formation were mobilized as forms of cross-boundary personal knowledge and deployed inside the Centre to raise the prestige of the speaker. On other occasions, such personal knowledge, indicated by naming, was relayed and converted into shared 'insider' knowledge.

The relations between the authority conferred by publication and the circuits of review, commentary and critique on their authors and the power of personal and participatory knowledges communicated orally are complex. They relate to the different values assigned to speech and text, or more specifically the published text.

The authority achieved by feminists whose texts are published and distributed for consumption by
established publishing houses (including the feminist houses established throughout the nineteen seventies such as Virago and the Women’s Press) rested partly upon the role of these texts in diffusing feminism beyond the enclaves of its emergence and in structuring the discursive formation of feminism, and partly on their role in achieving cultural legitimacy for feminist intellectual productions. Centre users generally exhibited an ambivalent attitude to these feminists, according them respect as feminists but viewing them as distant from themselves and as claiming superiority over their sisters. Personal acquaintance with them did however, as noted, confer prestige.

Interestingly, while knowledge from documentary sources (including print communications) was valued - especially if the text was deemed ‘difficult’ - knowledge derived from participation and personal interaction was regarded at the Centre as signifying more power. Because of the emphasis upon ‘the personal is political’ and informal social relations, oral communication, or ‘sharing’, was perceived as more authentic than the mediated communications constituted by publications. Story-telling and gossip, hailed as characteristic of ‘women’s speech’ (Rowbotham, 1972, p. 14) were, in principle, valued more highly than written texts, although in practice authority achieved through publication was frequently deferred to.

Questions of the differential effects of different forms and channels of communication are discussed in
detail in Chapter 5. At the Centre the different networks of communication are notable for the different types of knowledge and power which they signified.

To recapitulate, the shared stock of knowledge which constituted the basis of the Centre community of identification was derived partly from outside the Centre, via print communications and participation in the social networks of the Women's movement extending - and originating - beyond Riley House, and partly from participation in social and verbal interactions within the Centre itself. Different forms of knowledge were ranked, and their ranking in terms of power and prestige was negotiated according to the strategies and contexts of their deployment. They were also unevenly distributed, and sometimes in competition.

During the negotiations for a new site an additional form of regional knowledge became highly valued - knowledge of local government organization, transmitted through social networks with local politicians operative in social and political milieux outside the women's movement.

These 'special relationships', their communicative functions and knowledge functions are addressed in terms of their derivation in Chapter 3 and in relation to the conduct of negotiations in Chapter 7. They constituted a further type of knowledge deployed by Centre users in their (successful) attempts to maintain a distinctive community of identity.
To summarize the arguments in this Chapter; 2.1 introduces the Women's Centre as a social site which is historically and culturally derived from and structured in relation to the contemporary feminist formation and the women's liberation movement. The Women's Centre has a fluid social composition with users who do not all interact with each other and who attend different group meetings at the Centre and elsewhere. It had shifting and permeable boundaries which mediated at a symbolic rather than a structural level the world of feminist identity and difference, but nevertheless constituted a distinctive community of identification within a constellation of feminist communities.

The threat to the Centre identity contained in the reclamation of the Riley House site for redevelopment triggered an intensification of the Centre community of identification through the mobilisation of significant feminist Others, constructed as 'Them' and opposed to 'us' as negotiations were conducted across the boundary of the Centre. In the process the boundary itself became more clearly demarcated, and some degree of social closure occurred.

2.2 reviews the questions of identity and difference involved in Centre users' perceptions of feminism and the women's movement. Following a review of differences, divisions and identifications within contemporary feminism, three inter-related but analytically distinct categories of feminism are defined; the discursive
formation of feminism, the women's movement and a sectarian dimension referred to as the Women's Movement. The women's movement, as the social dimension of feminism, is defined as the social field of feminist networks, and it is in this social field that the Women's Centre has to be located.

Section 2.3, examines the Women's Centre as a community of identification organized around a shared stock of knowledge, and traces the sources of different forms of knowledge, and the ways in which these are converted into shared forms of 'insider' knowledge or restricted to a small number of individuals, thereby contributing to the informal power structure of the Women's Centre.

The different forms of knowledge were unevenly distributed among the Centre users and ranked in changing ways in different contexts. On occasion they were in competition rather than shared. Nevertheless, they functioned to provide Centre users with a particular stock of knowledge collectively interpreted in distinctive ways, via 'insider' accounts. They also functioned to link Centre users with feminists and movement participants in other feminist groups, along social networks which crossed the boundaries of the Centre community but were used to promote distinctive collective identification by Centre users, that is, the Riley House Centre community of identification.
3. THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT AS THE CONTEXT OF THE WOMEN'S CENTRE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The analysis of the organization of Riley House and the negotiation of identity and difference which occurred as a feature of daily life, requires the location of the Women's Centre in the women's movement and the broader feminist formation. The Centre constituted one of a constellation of interest groups and communities of identification. While for some Centre users Riley House was the only feminist community in which they participated, many Centre users derived from other sites and groupings in the feminist formation, and moved between groups inside the Centre and groups based elsewhere. Women from other Centres or campaign groups used Riley House regularly as a base for canvassing support for a variety of activities.

The contemporary feminist context of Riley House was, however, structured by the history of 'second wave feminism', by the contexts and conditions of emergence of the women's liberation movement, and the career of the women's movement which succeeded and subsumed it.

The history of the women's movement was inscribed in the landscape of the feminist formation during the period of fieldwork, and affected the everyday practices at the Women's Centre.

This chapter reviews the emergence of the women's liberation movement, its organization and structure, and
the changing and different cultural and social affiliations of its initiators and participants from the period immediately prior to the emergence of the first women’s liberation groups in 1968 to the period of fieldwork, which coincided with the final national conference of the women’s liberation movement.

This does not attempt to even approximate to a history of the women’s movement. Rather, it provides a historical perspective on the Women’s Centre and the feminist landscape in which it was located, and, focuses upon the development of social relations and cultural practices which underpin and inform the social and cultural processes at the Centre.

In 3.1 the emergence of ‘Women’s liberation’ is addressed not so much in terms of its roots in a period of rapid economic, social and cultural change, as it most commonly is but in terms of the specific concrete social locations from which it emerged. The formation of a new social movement with a specific collective identity and a potential for collective action cannot be explained solely in terms of the rapidity of structural change or a period of transition and a position of ‘liminality’ (Martin, 1981; Turner, 1974) or of contradictions between the changed structural positions of women and inherited cultural definitions (Delmar, 1976). Rather the specific forms in which women’s liberation groups realised the potentialities of their historical location is analysed here in terms of the particular social locations and
ideological positions inhabited by its initiators.

This section focuses upon the role of the shared gendered participation of the movement initiators in these social locations in the mobilisation of a new collective identity; in other words, it focuses upon their position as women, and the ways in which their experiences of marginalisation and subordination in specific 'new situations' (Mannheim, 1952) underpinned the formation of a new group consciousness and a new interpretation of their position as women.

This is developed in 3.2, which reviews the conditions necessary for the emergence of a new collective identity first in the context of the American Women's Movement, as a kind of proto-second-wave feminism which served, to an extent, as both precedent and template for later varieties of women's movements, and then in the English context.

Section 3.3 relates the tensions which were in play in the social locations, and between them and the newly emergent women's liberation groups to the division within the women's movement between the socialist and radical feminist currents. The establishment of socialist feminism and radical feminism as the two poles of the feminist field are examined in terms of their social and symbolic functions at the Women's Centre. It must be stressed however that not all individual women at the Centre who claimed to support one of the two main currents of feminism necessarily agreed with or acted according to the positions outlined in this section. Despite this,
however, the terms ‘socialist feminist’ and radical feminist’ were used to denote both feminist positions and individual women.

The central role of social networks in the structure and organisation of the movement is examined in 3.4 with reference to the relative openness of the Centre and the accommodation of difference there. It is argued that social networks established in the social groups from which women’s liberation emerged are re-activated on occasion at the Centre to provide social resources for the Centre users, particularly during negotiations with the local Council. In other words, while tensions between feminism and the older configurations of political culture worked to promote division in the movement at a national level the social networks of Centre users involving individuals from these same older political groupings were activated to the advantage of the women at Riley House and contributed to its survival.

3.1 The emergence of the contemporary feminist formation and the women’s movement as a gender-specific generational entelechy

The emergence of the ‘new social movements’ is usually discussed, as a general phenomenon, in terms of the high rate of structural and cultural change during the late nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties, as noted in chapter 2. The roots of the movements are variously

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located in a crisis of authority, a crisis of hegemony, or a crisis of legitimacy.

Feminist accounts of the emergence of the women’s liberation movement have addressed the gender-blindness of these approaches, which in general fail to deal with the specific changes in the position of women, and which function to obscure the domination of the movements by men (Evans, 1979; Breines, 1982; Coote and Campbell, 1982).

In themselves, however, as argued earlier, these feminist accounts of the contradictions encountered by women of this historical generation cannot explain the processes by which ‘second-wave’ feminism became established, or the specific forms which characterised the new collective identifications underpinning ‘women’s liberation’.

The diverse array of oppositional movements cited in these accounts (Rowbotham, 1972, 1989; Mitchell, 1971; Coote and Campbell, 1982; Segal, 1982) indeed indicates the political and social climate of the period, and maps out a range of social, political and cultural upheavals which affected the initiators and early activists to varying degrees and in different ways. It does not, however, explain the particular configurations taken by women’s liberation. It is worth re-iterating that the delineation of the potentialities of the historical location of the particular generation of women, and the description of particular cultural and political influences cannot contribute much to the explanation of
the specific form in which these potentialities were realized in the emergent movement, or its social composition.

The particular configuration of contemporary feminism and the form taken by the women's movement during this period cannot be seen as determined by the structural features of the social world inhabited by a particular historical generation of women, but need to be addressed in their particularity, and in relation to the concrete social locations from which they emerged.

Mannheim's reflections upon the emergence of the German Youth movements of the nineteen twenties (Mannheim, 1952) are useful in this context, since, after Pinder, he makes much of the 'non-contemporaniety of the contemporaneous' (Mannheim, 1952, p. 21), and the differential exposure to of various groups and individuals to particular aspects of rapid social and cultural change. On this basis, the sixties can be viewed as the historical generational location from which the initiators of the women's liberation emerged and the broad context within which the new intellectual and cultural perspectives and configurations which they formulated achieved recognition. In this sense, they functioned to predispose the women of that generation to particular 'modes of thought and structures of feeling and to characterise types of historically relevant action' (ibid, p. 291), but cannot be seen as determining them.

In Mannheim's model of generation, shared generational
status, however, becomes a sociologically or ethnographically significant factor in the development of new intellectual and cultural forms only when it involves participants in the same concrete social and historical locations. The groups which are instrumentally involved in generating new configurations of meaning are those which constitute a concrete nexus of relationships around the shared experience of the 'interactions of forces which make up a new situation' (ibid, p. 305). In these situations only, Mannheim argues, generation functions 'as actuality'.

The prime agents in Mannheim's theory however, are the members of generational units, groups within the same actual generation which re-work their interpretations of their common experiences in particular collective ways. These units are defined as interpretative communities, characterised by 'an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences', (ibid, p. 306).

This definition encompasses the early women's liberation groups which began to meet in the late nineteen sixties, groups which constituted the nuclei of the Movement which was formally established in 1970. These groups were formed around and informed the development of a new collective identity for women; indeed they formulated and articulated their interpretations of their new situations in ways which realised the potentialities latent in the wider generational location in a form with
which women outside these particular social locations could identify.

The initiators of women's liberation need to be located in the specific sites in which the embryonic feminist entelechy and new feminist collective identity emerged. While the roots of the movement can be located in the historical generational location, it is the routes taken by the initiators and early activists to a new group consciousness and the formation of 'generational units' and the concrete social locations which these routes traversed which must be the primary objects of study in an analysis of the development of women's liberation. There is no single or dominant entelechy, but a number of entelechies, or configurations of realized potentialities, each typically but not exclusively associated with a particular historical generation. Just as elements of class ideologies can appeal to individuals outside their 'proper habitat', so elements of generational entelechies can appeal to individual members of an older - or younger - generation.

The 'older' well established formations of the labour movement and the New Left in particular were continually in tension with the emergent women's movement and feminist formation, structuring their particular configurations. Similarly, after its first decade, different generational forms of feminism existed (as noted in 2.2), sometimes in tension with each other, sometimes in conflict. The tensions between New Left established forms and the
feminist forms are discussed in 3.3 and 3.4

The key problem with Mannheim's model of the processes of emergence of new generational entelechies for the analysis of women's liberation is, of course, that Mannheim's model is gender-blind. Women's liberation is both gender-specific and organised around sexual politics. An analysis of the development of women's liberation has to focus upon the gender-specific aspects of new situations, and upon the 'fresh contact' by women with the traditionally male-oriented social locations in which they participated. The following section examines the shared concrete social locations as both generational and gendered, as the sites in which the realization of the latent potentialities of the historical generation were achieved by the participants through their experiences as women.

3.2 Social locations and the formation of feminist consciousness

This section analyses the emergence of the women's liberation movement within the framework outlined by Mannheim, in terms of the particular locations in which a significant number of women came to perceive themselves as members of an oppressed social group and to generate a new generational entelechy on the basis of group-
consciousness or collective identity.¹

The political, social and cultural currents which characterized the terrain in which the British movement was rooted were, as noted, the American Civil Rights movement, the Black Consciousness movement, the European student movements and libertarian counter cultures. The specific social locations in which a new collective identity and an embryonic generational entelechy emerged were however normally reached by the women involved by routes which traversed the intellectual field, and the overlapping - but not co-terminus - fields of New Left and radical political culture. The terms 'radical politics' and 'New Left politics' are frequently used interchangeably in feminist testimonies and histories of the movement, emphasizing the shared spheres of action and shared objectives.

The term 'New Left' as used in this thesis both distinguishes New Left culture from the 'Old Left' configuration with its association with the Labour movement and the Communist Party of Great Britain on the one hand, but also emphasizes its roots in the 'Old' Left. It's mouthpiece was (and is) the New Left Review journal.

¹ The use of the term 'social group' does not imply the usual criterion of regular social interaction. The term is used to underpin the processes involved in the mobilisation of a new 'group consciousness' in the terms discussed below. The following authors also use the term 'group' in a similar manner: Mitchell, 1984; Evans, 1979; Rowland, 1984.

² The Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.) needs to be distinguished from the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and the Revolutionary Communist Party. The term 'Communist Party' refers to the C.P.G.B. in this thesis.
The term 'radical politics' stresses political activities and groupings which were not affiliated to party politics and were associated with 'the Underground', cultural struggle, and more militant political groupings such as the Angry Brigade.

The emphasis on cultural struggle was in fact shared in common with the New Left, and functions to distinguish Old Left and New Left. A commentator of the late nineteen fifties, charting the progress of the New Left through the journals The New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review - predecessor of the New Left Review - and through the Oxford intelligentsia declared that:

'Oxford Societies ... are scarcely concerned at all with politics as it's usually understood. What are they concerned with instead? The short superficial answer is culture. "Look Back in Anger" one prominent University Left Winger shouted at me recently "is a more important political document than anything the Labour Party has said since 1951" (Marquand, 1958).

Nevertheless, the New Left was more closely allied to the 'Old Left' of political parties than the radicals. It was the involvement of women in these fields, normally in a marginal position, which facilitated or triggered their new perceptions and interpretations of the wider social and historical location. This provided the basis for the emergence of a feminist group consciousness.

This group consciousness may be viewed as analogous to the marxist formulation of 'class-for-itself'. Just as the existence of an objectively defined collectivity - women - is analogous to the category of 'class-in-itself'
in so far as it exists according to objective criteria, so the possibility of the mobilisation of a consciousness based on gender-for-itself is analogous to the possibility of the mobilisation of 'class-for-itself', where this is defined as 'a collectivity with a self-conscious subjective identity, able to act on its own behalf' (Evans, 1979, pp. 91-2).

While the inadequacy of traditional marxist approaches to class-for-itself, and the conditions under which it may emerge, have long been noted - as has the much lauded exception of E.P. Thompson's work - (Dahrendorf, 1959; Ollman, 1972, pp. 4-12) feminists engaged in 'consciousness - raising' activities developed more coherent approaches to the conditions necessary for the mobilisation of feminist group consciousness (Freeman, 1978; Evans, 1979).¹

In her study of the American women's liberation movement Sara Evans proposes five conditions for the emergence of a collective group consciousness of this kind; five concrete, local conditions obtaining in the political field. Given the status of the American movement as a form of late twentieth century proto-feminism, and its global influence in setting the agenda for women's liberation, it is worth outlining Evan's

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¹ Bujra points out that 'gender-for-itself' could be more usefully viewed as a strategic metaphor for feminist consciousness than as an analogy with 'class-for-itself', since an analogy would imply (untenably) a notion of 'sex-class' (Bujra, 1977, pp. 41-42). The analogy is involved here not to imply a 'sex-class' but rather to characterise the particular form of feminist consciousness which emerged with women's liberation.
argument. In her view, the relevant conditions are:

1) Access to new social spaces in the political field in which received cultural definitions can be challenged

2) An ideology which can explain the structural bases of a group, justify revolt, and provide visions of a qualitatively new future

3) Role models of group members breaking out of traditional patterns

4) A threat or threats to the new group definition which produces a confrontation with inherited cultural definitions

5) A communications network by means of which the emergent consciousness can be extended beyond the immediate context of situation (Evans, 1979, pp. 92-3).

In Evans' view, the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) in the Southern States, and the Economic Research and Action projects (ERAP) in the Northern cities constituted the social spaces to which women gained access, usually through their participation in Students for Social Democracy (SDS) campus organizations. These organizations also provided an egalitarian ideology, provided a basis for revolt on grounds of racism and urban poverty, and provided new visions of the future.

In the American context, role models of active women, asserting new attitudes and patterns of behaviour in the public sphere were provided by Black, usually protestant,
women in the South and also, significantly, by stories told by their mothers of their involvement in the 'Old Left' in the nineteen thirties and forties. Reciprocal relations between new generational formations and the older ones came into play mediated by mother-daughter relations. Many of the mothers of women involved in the emergent women's liberation participated in the campaign against the Vietnam War and in supporting resistance to the draft (Breines, 1982; Freeman, 1975).

In the course of their participation in these organizations, the women experienced contradictions between the egalitarian ideology and their own marginalisation and subordination by men within the context of situation. Stokeley Carmichael's pronouncement that 'The only position for a women is prone' is viewed by many feminists as an incident typical of the situation and because of its wide circulation, in Britain as well as the USA, one which motivated dozens of women to organize on their own behalf (Coote and Campbell, 1982; Evans, 1979; Breines, 1982).

In Evans's analysis, these attitudes and the corresponding practices were perceived by the female participants as a threat to their vision of the future, and served to precipitate the formation of the women's liberation movement.

Evans quotes a note issued to 'Women of the Left' at the New Left Convention in Chicago in the summer of 1967, which extended the specific situational experiences of the
women in the SNCC and ERAP to the broader generational location, and thus founded the movement.

"Realizing that this is a social problem of national significance, not at all confined to our struggle for personal liberation in the movement, we must approach it in a political manner. Therefore it is incumbent upon us, as women, to organize a movement for liberation" (Evans, 1979, from Freeman files, 1967).

It was during the autumn following the Chicago Convention that a large number of women’s liberation groups sprung up, initially composed of disaffected women from the New Left, but increasingly joined by women outside these enclaves who mobilised on the basis of ‘gender-in-itself’, identified patriarchy as the root of their subordination and the object of struggle and began to take collective action.

These conditions, while not sufficient in themselves, also figured in the British context. The comparable new social spaces which became available to women in the intellectual and political fields were located in the student movements, the New Left, and the radical cultural politics associated with events such as the Dialectics of Liberation Conference, the Anti-University, the Poetry Festival of 1967, and the alternative press, (International Times, Friends, Oz and Black Dwarf).

These were notably less embattled and less structured situations than their American counterparts which had specific objectives, and all operated within the intellectual field, where this is defined in the broad sense proposed by Bourdieu. In this definition, the
intellectual field is conceptualised as 'a system of power lines' and 'the constituting agents or systems of agents may be described as so many forces which by their existence, opposition or combination, determine its specific structure at a given time' (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 161).

In this definition, the intellectual field is not restricted to academia; its agents may be involved in a wide range of intellectual production and exchange, both legitimated and oppositional or 'counter cultural'. The parameters of the field are therefore variable.

The social locations in which the initiators of women's liberation participated extend, then, well beyond the confines of campus politics and the social milieux in which intellectuals or the intelligentsia are traditionally located, but remain significantly structured by the relations of the intellectual field.

This point raises questions regarding the social composition of women's liberation in its early years, which is normally described as 'middle class intellectuals' (Segal, 1983; Bouchier, 1985) or the 'metropolitan intelligentsia' (Martin, 1981). Questions of the classification of women in terms of social class are addressed in detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the social composition of groups meeting at Riley House. At this point, the issue is the distinction between the traditional categories 'intelligentsia' and 'intellectuals' and their predominantly middle class
membership on the basis of almost any system of classification using objective co-relates on the one hand, and their definition in terms of participation, in the intellectual field in the sense outlined above, on the other.

Firstly, not all the initiators of the British movement had been through or were involved in higher education. Not all were qualified to do so. Even on the basis of a generous definition of an intellectual as any one with a 'tertiary education', not all the women concerned can be classified as intellectuals (Churchwarden, 1973).

Secondly, access to the intellectual field was for many of the women concerned, mediated by a male partner. Examples of this mediated access abound in feminist testimonies. One woman declared, with reference to the Student Movement at her local university:--

'I was pregnant during the occupation of the university and I was distanced from it both by being pregnant and being a woman. The only women who were involved in it were the ones who were having relationships with the men. If you couldn't be part of the university culture you were marginalised' (cited in Coote and Campbell, 1982, p. 15).

Testimonies from Riley House users confirm that their access to particular locations in the intellectual field was also mediated by male partners. An American informant who was a member of the collective which founded the Belsize Park Women's Centre, and a member of one of the first women's liberation groups, did not embark on tertiary education. She came to London with her
'boyfriend' who pursued post-graduate studies. 'He got me in to radical politics' she declared.

Similarly, two members of the consciousness-raising group relate how they were encouraged to join women's liberation in the early years of its formation by their husbands, one an undergraduate, one a postgraduate student, who (initially) perceived 'Women's Lib' as an appropriate activity for a radical young wife. The point to be stressed here is that while most of the routes of Centre users to the movements of the nineteen seventies, like those of the initiators of women's liberation, traversed the intellectual field, the women themselves cannot be classified unproblematically as 'middle class intellectuals/intelligentsia'.

Once access was achieved, directly or indirectly through a male partner, the intellectual field and the political cultures which flourished within it provided the female participants with social spaces which functioned to provide the social and symbolic space for the development of a new group consciousness and embryonic women's movement for the female participants. These provided new social arenas for women to meet collectively outside the traditional frameworks of family, neighbourhood and small friendship group.

These locations also provided access to egalitarian ideologies and cultures of resistance, with capitalism, wage labour, consumerism and imperialism perceived in varying degrees as underpinning structures of oppression
(Hall, 1979; Jameson, 1984). They also provided visions of a new future. As Gifflin records, the New Left thrived on the ‘imaginative proximity of revolution’ (Gifflin, 1987), while in the student movements

‘there was a new sense of what was possible ... the students life of postponed gratification and unacknowledged isolation for moments, at mass meetings and sit-ins, melted into an exultant recognition of solidarity’ (Widgery, 1976, p. 58).

Women’s position in these brief moments of ‘existential communitas’, in Turner’s phrase (Turner, 1974) was both marginal and subordinate. As the female participants claimed the new visions of the future proposed by the New Left and radical cultures of the intellectual field, the locations in which the women experienced a new sense of their own potential proved to be the sites of their subordination. They found themselves reduced to menial and domestically aligned roles; the gender relations in which they were enmeshed continued to be taken for granted and inherited ideologies of femininity and masculinity continued to function in traditional ways in the midst of much acclaimed ‘sexual liberation’.

The new potentialities perceived by the women were threatened by the restrictions which they experienced as women, ideologically constructed and culturally defined in ways which both marginalised and subordinated their activities and contradicted their newly claimed ideologies. There are many stories of outrage at the situation. An example given by Rowbotham is
characteristic. She recalls a meeting organised by women attending a 'revolutionary festival' at Essex University in 1969, to discuss leaflets produced by the American Red Stocking women's liberation group, and reports an intervention by a (male) member of the German S.D.S.

"He claimed that in a revolutionary movement you couldn't waste time on trivia, and the fact was that women certainly weren't capable of writing leaflets. In a smaller meeting we held later, a girl hissed venomously through her teeth "I always change his fucking leaflets when I type them, anyway"" (Rowbotham, 1972, p. 95).

At the end of this meeting, the women decided to exclude men from their future meetings, and these were held specifically in the name of women's liberation. The following year the founding National Conference of Women's Liberation was held in Oxford. Two of the women at the Centre attended.

As indicated in the incident cited, rumours of the American Women's Liberation Movement were spreading in England during 1967 and 1968. By 1969 some of the pamphlets and manifestos were circulating along the social networks constructed by women in the intellectual field. The American movement provided a precedent, and American individuals, groups or collectives provided role-models for the women in Britain.

In the British context, women in the Labour Movement also served as role models; the women workers at Fords who went on strike for equal pay during 1967 are regularly cited as influential models (Mitchell, 1971; Delmar, 1972,
Coote and Campbell, 1982; Rowbotham, 1972, 1989). The configurations associated with an older historical generation, the 'Old Left', were therefore involved in the formation of the women's liberation movement, but the interaction between generations, unlike the American one, functioned not between mothers and daughters, but through the more strongly established configurations embodied in the trade unions and political parties and the emergent feminist one (Weir and Wilson, 1984; Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1980).

This interaction was clear even at the founding conference of the Women’s Liberation Movement. A female trade unionist declared:

‘Feminism is not enough. I want women’s liberation to be a movement for people whether they are men or women’ (Neustatter, 1989, p. 28).

In summary, a new group consciousness and an embryonic gender-specific generational world view emerged from the concrete social locations shared by some women of the same historical generation and in tension with the older political generation, a tension which affected both the movement and the career of the Centre in the late nineteen seventies. The ‘new situations’ encountered by the initiators of the women’s liberation movement were located in the New Left and radical political cultures articulated within the intellectual field and functioned to provide new social spaces, new ideologies and visions of the future for their participants. At the same time, the
initiators directly experienced their position as marginalised and subordinated on the grounds of their gender, and mobilised a collective identification around gender in itself.

The routes taken to women's liberation by the initiators of the movement all traversed the intellectual field, although not all the women can be classified as 'intellectuals'. The tensions between the traditional labour movement and the New Left and radical politics which was evident in the intellectual field during the sixties in which the initiators of women’s liberation participated and noted above was re-articulated in the women’s liberation groups, the nuclei of a new gender-specific generational entelechy, and structured the relations between divergent tendencies in the women’s liberation movement itself.

3.3 Divisions within the women’s movement, the tensions between the movement and its field of emergence, and the topography of feminism.

The relations between the women’s liberation groups and the shared social locations of New Left and radical political groupings from which they emerged were ambivalent. The groups derived from shared generational social locations and were established in opposition to them; they also functioned parallel to them in many ways. The ambivalence emerges clearly in relation to the
communications networks mobilised by the group members, the fifth condition for the emergence of a new collective identity proposed by Evans. It is also evident in the debates at National Conferences in 1977 and 1978, and in the different publications which were circulating in the movement at that time.

Initially, the women's liberation groups used the communications systems already established by the New Left and radical groupings. Two seminal articles appeared by these means, Juliet Mitchell's "Women; The Longest Revolution" appeared in the New Left Review in 1964, in the context of the debate on domestic labour; Sheila Rowbotham's "Women's liberation and the New Politics" was printed in Black Dwarf in 1968. Both these articles were addressed to male colleagues, and assumed marxist frameworks of interpretation, and both were available only on the restricted circuits of exchange across the social locations in which the women had already participated. By 1969, however, the women's liberation groups began to establish an autonomous communications network, with a newsletter entitled Harpie's Bizarre. The name itself indicates an ideal readership beyond the enclaves of the intellectual field, and is a pun on the name of a popular women's magazine. The newsletter, re-named Shrew, again a title with ironic implications, provided a platform for women to directly oppose the political groupings from which women's liberation derived.

One article directly disassociates the writer from the
locations from which the groups emerged.

'I do not intend to ask permission from Peking before proceeding, I do not intend to neurotically consult marxengelslenin before baring my teeth or my tits' (*Shrew*, no. 3, 1969).

Others attempted to maintain links with the older configuration of political culture, but on new terms. One collective welcomed maoists and communists to women's liberation, but also extended an invitation to


This eclecticism represents the groupings of the formerly shared locations as equivalent in status and relevance to any other group in society. Feminism is the issue, not the social milieux from which the feminists emerged.

The same year, however, a group of active socialist women founded a magazine entitled *Socialist Women*, a feminist publication which continued to address the leadership of the left political culture. It is defensive in its rhetoric; the editorial of the first issue begins 'We are not anti-male...' (*Socialist Women Collective*, 1969). In this case, a particular affiliation is asserted. Women's liberation is represented as a development of the New Left, not as an opponent. Distance is constructed between the Collective position and other, hostile representations of women's liberation.

The tensions between the strong configurations of Left political culture and the embryonic feminist entelechy and
their reciprocal action are evident in a wide range of ephemera produced in the early years of women's liberation, such as those quoted from above, but initially there was no perception of divisions within the new movement.

The tensions which emerged between different tendencies in the women's liberation movement and the broader women's movement which succeeded it in the mid nineteen seventies and eventually subsumed it, relate to differing relations with older generations of political culture, and to the varying relations maintained by the initiators of women's liberation with their former fellows. These tensions can not be reduced in any simple way to differences between feminism and the older configurations of left political culture but the influence of inter-generational relations is clear.

The division between the socialist feminist and radical feminist tendencies which emerged early in the nineteen seventies constituted the central principle involved in the mapping of the feminist terrain later in the decade, and was used in this way by all the Women's Centre users at Riley House. As discussed in 2.2, they are best conceptualised as cultural currents in the women's movement at large, crystallizing into sectarian groups at various points, particularly at national conferences.

The division between the two tendencies formed the central principle of classification of feminisms and feminists within the women's movement, and functioned at
Riley House to map the contemporary feminist landscape. The social, political and communicative strategies characterising each tendency underpinned the social, political and communicative resources available at the Centre, and provided the stylistic markers by which the Centre users could identify particular political positions and react appropriately, to signal their proximity or distance to particular features of the feminist landscape.

The division persisted throughout the 'crisis in feminism' (Delmar, 1976) of the middle years of the decade, which arose at a certain point in the diffusion of women's liberation, or, in Mannheim's terminology, at a point in the extension of the embryonic women's movement beyond the locations of its emergence. This crisis, as noted in Chapter 2 involved a multiplication of claims for collective identifications with a 'woman-centred' variant of feminism which functioned to dilute the political content of feminism as initially formulated. It was characterised by a general shift, by participants as well as commentators, to the nomination of the movement as the 'women's movement', rather than 'women's liberation', and marked the beginning of the fragmentation of the movement.

In this Section, I examine the development of the division between the two tendencies, relate this division to the organisational structure of the women's movement and indicate its symbolic function in marking out the feminist landscape for the women at Riley House. In 3.4 I focus on the social networks activated by Centre users
across the radical-socialist split, and the ways in which Centre users drew on both feminist currents in everyday practice.

As noted in 2.2, for the initiators of the movement there were no antagonistic currents of feminism exerting competing claims for identification.

'In the beginning you said you were in Women's Lib, you called yourself a feminist' (Rowbotham, 1972).

Women's Liberation was an umbrella movement, a 'broad church' that would accommodate every version of feminism and offered a means by which all women could achieve an 'imaginative identification' with all other women on the basis of the lived experience of sex and gender (Rich, 1981). 'Sisterhood' was believed to derive from experiences of gender-based oppression common to all women and to transcend all differences between them, providing a base for collective action to overthrow male dominance and a 'cement' for the 'unity in diversity' which was the project for all the women involved (Wilson, 1986; Wandor, 1972; Weir and Wilson, 1985; Rowbotham, 1972, 1989).

By the late nineteen seventies, however, the tensions between feminists and the older generation of socialism and radical politics were re-articulated in the women's liberation movement as tensions between the radical and socialist feminists.

The divergence between the two tendencies cannot be related in any simple way to the specific groupings and social locations from which their participants moved into
women's liberation. Many radical feminists had formed women's liberation groups in the enclaves of the New Left, as exemplified by the group which published the attack on maoists quoted above. In any event, there is, as argued earlier, a convergence and overlapping of the radical and New Left fields to the extent that feminists use the term interchangeably in their recollections, (with the exception of the sectarian groupings of maoists and trotskyists).

There is also a good deal of confusion about the extent to which radical and socialist versions of feminism overlap or differ. The difficulties in constructing a consistent distinction between the two tendencies emerge clearly in a number of debates around the concept of patriarchy in the late nineteen seventies (Fairweather, 1979; Rowbotham, 1979; Alexander and Taylor, 1980; Coward, 1980). Chester notes a change in the issues at stake in claiming a radical feminist identity during the late seventies, and argues that it signifies a continuing commitment to Women's Liberation, as opposed to a 'woman-centred' brand of feminism rather than a specific theory and practice (Chester, 1979). Freeman has argued, interestingly, that the division is based on differences in 'style' (Freeman, 1979). The question of 'style' is taken up again in Chapter 7.

Women who called themselves radical feminists however, increasingly distanced themselves from the social locations from which the movement emerged, and attracted
new recruits who were not aligned to any particular political party or organization, the 'unattached individuals' who are viewed in Mannheim's scenario as likely recruits from other social locations to a new entelechy. Socialist feminists continued to recruit, for the most part, from socialist groups.

At the theoretical level, distinctions between radical and socialist feminism are clearer. Radical feminists, then as now, define patriarchy as male dominance, and claim this to be a transhistorical and universal feature, although it may manifest itself in a variety of ways historically and cross-culturally. Socialist feminists on the other hand argued then as now that patriarchy is structured by class relations and that gender relations are structured in relation to the social relations of production and reproduction at any given historical and social conjuncture. Their affiliation to 'the Left' was and is still much stronger than that of radical feminist currents.

While both tendencies foregrounded the personal experience of patriarchal practices as central in the mobilisation of feminist consciousness and the women's liberation movement, socialist feminists retained an allegiance to the ideological positions of the social locations from which the movement emerged while radical feminists both distanced themselves from it and refused to construct alliances with men in those locations, or indeed with any men.
In practice, as noted in 2.3 individual feminists of both tendencies interacted frequently; there was a good deal of collaboration and co-operation around most campaigns, and some of the theoretical and analytical work of the radicals was integrated, albeit amended, into socialist feminist theory and strategy and vice versa. Nevertheless, in addition to functioning at a symbolic level as the central principle of classification, the division between the two tendencies also caused social division at the national level.

In 1973 the division between the two tendencies became formalized into distinct social groupings with the formation of the socialist feminist group, referred to at Riley House as the 'socialist feminist network'. The term network clearly signals the continuing strength of the social networks between different groups. Many of these were established in the locations from which women’s liberation emerged. They also functioned to recruit other socialist women on these social networks, primarily women who were affiliated to, or members of, the Labour Party and Communist Party.

In 1972, a campaign was launched by the Power of Women Collective, for Wages for Housework. This was organised by a charismatic American, Selma James, who had previously been active in the Socialist Workers Movement in the United States, and as the wife of CLR James had achieved a certain renown. This campaign, which came to be associated with the Wages for Housework Collective, was
opposed by other women claiming a socialist feminist identity, and WFH members did not participate in the network. In other words, there were differences within the socialist feminist tendency, as well as between socialist and radical feminists.

As socialist feminists developed their alliances with other socialist groupings (composed of both women and men) radical feminism came to be associated with separatism and essentialism. Debates about the participation of men in running crèches and fund raising events, about the relevance or otherwise of left political groupings, dominated many meetings during the middle years of the seventies, and continued at Riley House. By 1974, socialist feminists were leaving the London Women's Liberation Workshops on the grounds of disagreements over separatism. At the Centre however, a common position was negotiated on the use of the Centre as a women-only space in all circumstances, as discussed in 5.4.

Radical feminists argued for the necessity of women-only action, as well as women-only spaces, and radical lesbians asserted the necessity for all feminists to withdraw from heterosexual relations. A group of lesbian feminists, who actually claimed the title of Revolutionary feminists, but were consistently referred to by disgruntled Centre users and consciousness-raising group members as 'radical feminists' constituted a key element of the sectarian dimension of the women's movement. They argued that heterosexual women were 'collaborators' with
‘the enemy’ - i.e. men - and beyond the pale of ‘true’ feminism.

Despite the fact that relatively few women were involved and claimed the label ‘Revolutionary’ rather than ‘radical’ feminists, this grouping had a disproportionate influence on the fragmentation of the women’s movement; it was perceived by many Centre users as a logical extreme of the radical feminist continuum, a warning of how far demands for separatism could go. They were regarded as exemplars of those women referred to in an ironic way as ‘Movement Women, with capitals’, a category with whom many Centre users did not wish to associate.

The division between the two tendencies culminated in confrontation at the National Conferences of Women’s Liberation. The 1978 conference turned out to be the last national conference. This occasion was marked by total disagreement between radical feminists and others on the issue of male violence.

The radical feminists operated on the basis of a unitary category of ‘man’, all uniformly oppressive and all marked by the potential for, or actuality of, sexual violence against women. Other feminists argued against a single category ‘man’, and by implication ‘woman’. Socialist feminists maintained the position that patriarchy is a form of social organisation which interacts with economic class and the wider relations of production and reproduction in different ways in different contexts. On this basis, capitalism as well as patriarchy
has to be overthrown. The 'enemy' was the system, not all individual men. Other feminists drew pragmatic distinctions between violent men and other men, acknowledging the potential for male violence deriving from dominant culture but drawing the line at constituting all men as violent by virtue of their sex.

This conference marked the beginning of the fragmentation of the movement.

The development of this antagonism between the radical and socialist feminist currents of feminism, and the fragmentation of the movement was paradoxically facilitated by the social organization of the women's liberation movement. This form of organization was instituted in the early months of "sisterhood" specifically to accommodate diversity and prevent the emergence of a 'party line', or a dominant intellectual and strategic configuration of the type against which the initiators of women's liberation mobilised.

The movement, as we have seen, was organized as a constellation of small autonomous groups, linked by the social networks of group members and convening formally only at national conferences, which were held at different venues each year in an attempt to undermine any notion of a geographical centre. There was no formal mechanism for regulating the relations between groups, or the activities within them.

As noted earlier, one of the most early definitions of the movement emphasises the structure and processes of the
small group as the 'atomic structure' of the movement (Wandor, 1972, p. 115).

This definition refers specifically to the consciousness raising groups characteristic of the period in which she was writing. The definition highlights the processes of these groups whereby the 'sharing' of personal experience functions to relate these inner experiences to the objective structures of the social world, and these in turn function to transform the initial experiences and to structure political action. Wandor's atomic analogy in taking small groups rather than individuals as basic units of the movement implies relations of reciprocity and mutuality are assumed. The scores of groups formed during the early years of the movement, linked by communications networks such as the Women's Information and Resources Service (WIRES) and by social networks did indeed transform their members' perceptions of personal inadequacy into political analyses of women's oppression but as indicated in 3.3 the nature of the political analyses and concomitant styles and strategies not only varied considerably but tended to crystallize around the two dominant tendencies, which operated at a national level neither mutually or reciprocally.

It is worth returning to the fact that the movement was organized on the basis of participation, not representation, in order to show how, at the national level, the organisation of the movement facilitated
division. No one attending a National Conference could represent her group; she could speak only for herself. Further, majority decisions were outlawed. Decisions were reached by consensus. In the absence of consensus, no resolution of specific issues in terms of one or other position was possible, and the polarisation of the two tendencies was facilitated by the very structures and organisational forms which had been designed to promote an egalitarian, participatory sisterhood of diversity.

The structure and organization of the movement therefore facilitated division as well as the accommodation of difference; it permitted stubborn (or committed) groups and individuals as well as those with a good grasp of group psychology to stall attempts at consensus. The reliance upon consensus-based decision-making and an absence of representation and accountability produced an oscillation between total formlessness and a kind of collective authoritarianism which was evident at national conferences.

The absence of any form of representation also led to situations in which individual women functioned as spokespersons for women's liberation in the public eye when in fact they represented nobody, since there was no structural means for holding them accountable for what they did. In other words, the lack of any representational system functioned to promote the growth of metonymic representations of the women's movement, in which a few high profile women collaborated with the mass
media to produce news-value and in so doing represented the public face of feminism. This had considerable effects on public perceptions of feminism and on the constituency of the Women’s Centres and feminist campaign groups.

The ideological positions were - and are - encoded in the styles of rhetoric, social interaction and political action associated with each tendency. Radical feminist rhetoric functions to mobilize an unproblematic ‘us’, an apparently homogeneous category of the oppressed - women. It privileges experience and belief over theory and analysis, offering, in Turner’s phrase, an ‘existential communitas’ (Turner, 1974). Radical feminists at this point organized in relatively closed groups, with access permitted only to women who identified with their specific position, rather than with women’s liberation in the broader sense. Social interaction was nevertheless established with women of many different views, since all women were viewed as belonging to the community of the oppressed, by virtue of being women.

Radical feminists were particularly involved in a politics of the spectacle, with spectacle and performance arts integral elements of all their demonstrations and campaigns. The political use of spectacle was in evidence throughout the seventies, at rallies opposing parliamentary Private Members Bills attempting to restrict access to abortion, and at Reclaim the Night and Women Against Violence against Women campaigns, in several of
which Centre users participated. It was frequently supported by other feminists who did not claim a 'radical' position.

The negotiation of identity and difference in rhetoric and political action was far more complex in the socialist feminist current of the movement than in the radical feminist stream. Socialist feminism acknowledged difference as well as identity among women, primarily on the basis of class and, from the mid seventies, on the basis of sexuality and ethnicity. It did not provide as clear or unambiguous a basis for collective identification as the radical variant, whose unproblematic 'us' and homogeneous 'them' provided a clearcut focus for a sense of belonging.

Socialist feminism did however provide - among other things - the means by which feminists could maintain their social networks and affiliations with the established political organizations and fields of action which was the seedground of women's liberation. Their political strategy permitted alliances with other socialists, regardless of their sex. This also functioned strategically in social terms, as feminists maintained, in changed conditions, their social networks in the fields from which they had entered the movement in the first place. These were selectively re-activated in pursuit of various feminist objectives, as noted in 3.4 and described in Chapter 7.

In summary, the division between the two tendencies was
structured by the different relationships which each tendency adopted with the social locations from which women's liberation emerged and it was articulated around issues of separatism, social, political and sexual. It functioned to map the feminist terrain for the women at Riley House, and to provide the two main poles of the movement in relation to which individuals and groups took up their positions. Despite this, and despite the social closure and distinctive tactics of some radical feminist groups, in practice, Centre users adopted and combined positions associated with both tendencies.

3.4. The accommodation of difference at the Women's Centre.

At Riley House the division between the two tendencies was submerged in practice in both group activities and informal discussions between women belonging to different groups. Inside the Women's Centre the symbolic function of the radical - socialist distinction in mapping the feminist landscape (both contemporary and historical) was primary at this level.

Several incidents illustrate this submergence of division. One such example is provided by the occasion on which members of the socialist feminist discussion group on the family spent an evening discussing their position on domestic violence without addressing issues of class or ethnicity, although in terms of their explicitly signalled
political position and their activities in campaigning groups such as Women Against Racism and Fascism (WARF) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) these issues were central.

On another occasion, the Women’s Therapy group, who tended to employ undifferentiated categories of feminity and masculinity, and therefore to some extent adopted a radical feminist viewpoint, did discuss the relevance of social class differences to their self-images. Both groups drew on the theory and practice which in other contexts they attributed to the feminist tendency from which they explicitly distanced themselves. In an interpersonal context, these distinctions lapsed.

Familiarity with the complex configurations of the feminist landscape of which the division between the tendencies was the key landmark, was important at the Centre, however. It constituted an important element in the informal power structure at Riley House which traversed the separate groups. As noted earlier, when asked about the political significance to the movement of particular past events, or the social composition of particular groups and the nature of their feminist affiliations and constituencies, Centre users would often say "Ask Belinda, she knows all about that" or "Ask Marianne, she’s been around for years". The esteem in which the particular generation of feminism to which a particular woman belonged, related partly to the length of time an individual had been involved in the movement (whether she was an ‘initiator’ or ancestress), but also
to the extent of knowledge of the contemporary field of feminism together with an acquaintance with feminist 'initiators' or prominent spokeswomen or authors.

The women referred to as authorities in these contexts were always members of the core collective, (or former members of it) and this group of women was the most actively involved in the negotiations with the local council for a new site for the Women's Centre. Their knowledge of the feminist terrain interacted with another form of local knowledge which they possessed - knowledge of the local community as structured by local government, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

Knowledge of the divisions within feminism thus constituted a resource which the core collective mobilised both within the Women's Centre and outside it. The divisions thus had a social function at the level of the Women's Centre, in structuring informal power relations and in facilitating the achievement of instrumental objectives, without promoting the confrontations which characterised national conferences.

At a local level at Riley House, feminist social networks functioned to counter group based antagonisms by providing the means by which individual women moved between groups, and across the Centre boundary.

They functioned to promote an openness at Riley House, and to act against an extended phase of social closure at the Women's Centre. When one group member announced that she proposed to attend an event elsewhere or participate
in a particular campaign group, another woman, not necessarily from the same group, frequently joined her. She would invariably encounter her experiences of the event or campaign to Centre users, thus providing a shared (Centre) version of it and contributing to 'local knowledge'. Thus, individuals from the groups at Riley House moved between groups, contributing to the fluid social composition of the Women's Centre (and indeed of other feminist groupings) and at the same time to the shared stock of knowledge of the Centre community.

The contexts in which the Centre achieved and maintained for any length of time a degree of social closure and an intense subjective sense of belonging among its users were those in which the women were threatened by the loss of the Riley House identity, and are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. For most of the Centre's lifetime, the social networks of the Centre users produced the Centre as one among many of a whole constellation of communities of identity, under the umbrella of the encompassing community of feminism.

The social networks of the Centre users which extended outside the feminist formation were activated selectively in the interests of the Centre, as discussed in 3.4. Social networks, in summary, functioned firstly to disperse Centre users across a wide field of feminist action and a large number of feminist groupings. Secondly they also functioned to defuse at the local level the conflicts arising out of the consensus-based decision-
making and lack of formal accountability at the national level by preventing the social closure of the groups. Finally they functioned as resources for the achievement of shared instrumental objectives and in this respect were, paradoxically, central factors in maintaining the identity of the Riley House Women’s Centre.

In summary, it is clear from events at Riley House that the particular social locations from which women’s liberation emerged exerted a continuing set of influences on the women’s movement. Different orientations to these locations structured the polarisation of differences at a national level within the women’s movement. Both the feminist reactions against the older political and cultural configurations and the continuing interaction between feminists and the older political generations underpinned the division between radical feminism and socialist feminism. This division functioned to mark out the feminist terrain and provide landmarks by which Centre users and other feminists oriented themselves. The division functioned primarily for Centre users as a means of classifying women outside the Centre, notably at National Conferences. At Riley House, membership of the socialist-feminist group or the Women’s Therapy group were not taken by Centre users to indicate division but acceptable difference, a view perhaps based on personal association and a shared Centre identification.

The social organisation of the movement itself facilitated division; at the Centre the principles of
participation by all women were contravened.

The strategies of exclusion which the Centre users devised to pre-empt division at Riley House are examined in 6.4 in the context of an analysis of hierarchies of opposition, difference and identity which emerged in the spatial organization of the Centre. Briefly, these included excluding women from the Centre who participated in pre-constituted groups and organizations, and requiring socialist feminists to demonstrate that they were not ‘aligned’ to any socialist groups (even though they were members of the Communist party or Labour party). These exclusions did not conform to movement principles.

Together with the selective activation of social networks discussed above however, they functioned to maintain the Centre community in the context of the fragmentation of the movement.
4. WOMEN'S ROUTES TO THE WOMEN'S CENTRE AND MEANINGS OF THE WOMEN'S CENTRE

This chapter examines the social composition of the groups using the Centre, the stories told by individuals about how they came to the Centre and the movement and the relations between women in different groups within the Centre and outside it.

As noted in the Introduction, the emphasis in this thesis is upon the routes taken by women to the Centre and the movement and the shared social locations which they traversed, rather than upon the cultural and historical roots of the movement which provided the general context. In chapters 2 and 3 it was argued that for the initiators of the movement the route to the first women's liberation groups and the establishment of the formal women's movement led from the closely related - though not co-terminus - intellectual field and the political cultures of the New Left and radical politics. In chapter 5 it is argued that for many women who 'joined' later, the route to the movement was signposted by feminist books or articles and that their self-identification as feminists and their acceptance as such by established feminist groups was facilitated by these.

It is argued that the routes taken by individual women to the Centre and the movement and the stories which the women tell of the circumstances of their initial entry into the women's movement and their subsequent activities
reveal more about the meanings of the Centre than an analysis of the Centre in terms of its social composition alone could show.

Further, the analysis of the social composition of the Centre raises the questions of women and social class and of the appropriate criteria for establishing a woman’s class. The question of appropriate criteria for establishing women’s social positions is considered in the context of a discussion of the relevance of a range of social factors to the negotiation of feminist identities. In the analysis of the Centre users’ routes to the Centre and of the groups in which they participate I focus in 4.1 upon the ways in which the women experience and make sense of the social structure and their position within it, rather than upon their location in the class system according to a specific set of objective criteria available from stratification theory.¹

Subjective class perceptions and the co-relates of the self-assignment of class are therefore taken to be of greater relevance to this analysis of the Centre users because the objective of the analysis is to ascertain the women’s perceptions of their own positions, and the factors involved in their decisions to join the Centre and the uses they made of it.

Research into subjective aspects of class/status have

¹ The attack on stratification theory (in the American structural-functionalist and the British neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist traditions alike) was launched by Acker (1973). The five shortcomings which she lists are still evident, in different combinations, in most of the class theory in mainstream sociology.
generally focused upon the extent of individual class-consciousness - i.e. the identification of by an individual of her or his social class and a sense of 'belonging' to a particular class or class fraction - and whether individuals see society as structured into bounded classes or as a continuous status hierarchy. In this context, a distinction between class awareness and class consciousness is important here: individuals can be aware of - and resent - inequalities without thereby necessarily having a sense of belonging to a particular class (Wright, 1985).

All the Centre users were aware of class inequality; the socialist-feminists, of course, viewed class in relation to the means of production in Marxist terms. Other Centre users however, tended in their assessments of other women to co-relate class with both the market situation on Weberian lines and the consumption situation, taking income, educational qualifications, life-style and the class of the head of the household in the family or origin as co-relates of class (if not determinations) as well as occupation.

In a context in which married women were not usually financially independent and conventional practice allocated women a class position on the basis of the occupation of the head of household (defined as male, regardless of the circumstances in any particular household), this perception of class as a multi-factorial entity is not surprising. Indeed, it is a useful one. It
conforms to the perceptions of a high proportion of women interviewed in recent surveys and is acknowledged in a range of theoretical positions.¹

In the following section I argue that all of these factors are relevant to the routes taken by the women to the Centre, as well as family relations and social age. In 4.1 the Centre users (and former Centre users) are presented in relation to the groups in which they participated; the women who did not participate regularly in either of the groups or the Collective meetings and their acknowledgement by other Centre users as 'one of us' despite this lack of regular participation are also considered.

4.1 The groups and individuals at the Women’s Centre, and the relations between them.

In this section the two long-established groups with specific projects - the socialist feminist group and the Women’s Therapy group - are examined in relation to their social composition, the routes by which individual women came to participate in the group and the Centre, the meanings of the Centre for the groups and the uses made of it by the groups and individuals. The position of occasional Centre users and the meanings the Centre has

¹ Abbott and Sapsford's review of the theoretical models and methodologies of a number of surveys of women's self-assignment and allocation of social class is the source for this assertion (Abbott and Sapsford, 1987).
for them are also discussed.

4.1.1 The socialist-feminist network discussion group on the family

The socialist-feminist discussion group met on Tuesday evenings in the main room of the Centre, with six women (and the researcher) attending regularly, and occasional attendance by one other woman. Four of the women – Louisa, Clare, Sandy and Marianne – formed the group at the Centre, together with Marje, an American who left the group in 1976 but continued to attend the Centre occasionally, and to meet several of the group members at other socialist feminist meetings and conferences and at other feminist events. Another group member, Laurie, joined the group at the Centre soon after its founding and continued to attend meetings. The final member of the group, Ann, joined the group a few months before my arrival.

Laurie, Louisa and Marianne were members of the core Collective, the small group of women who effectively organised the quotidian affairs of the Centre and were involved in the negotiations for a new site. Clare and Marianne were among the ‘initiators’ of the women’s movement; both were involved in the establishment of the Women’s Refuge and the first Women’s Centre in Belsize Park. Clare continued as a residential worker at the Refuge on its second (permanent) site.
In terms of their social positions, the women in this group had much in common. They were all English, and all unmarried, although Louisa and Marianne were living with men, as 'co-habitees' in the idiom of the social services which was adopted (ironically) by the group. None had children. Apart from Ann, who was an undergraduate barely twenty years of age, all the women were in their twenties or early thirties.

All the women had tertiary education - although Ann had not completed hers. Laurie had a diploma in Art and Design, had worked as a fashion designer and was currently employed in teaching English as a foreign language in a co-operative enterprise. Louisa and Marianne were both social workers. Sandy was an officer for a trade union, and had completed a degree, as had Clare.

The women related differently to the Centre in terms of the extent and significance of their participation. Marianne, a member of the older generation of feminists was one of the women who 'organized' the Centre; she was held in some esteem by almost all of the Centre users because of her history of involvement in feminism and the range of her social contacts both across the women's movement, in the local Council and in the Communist and Labour parties at the constituency level and (to a lesser extent) in their executive bodies.

Louisa had attended the Centre since it was established at Riley House but was not one of the founding Collective. She came to Riley House from another Centre in Islington.
As a member of the core Collective she was committed to the Centre; she also took the discussion group seriously, rarely missing a meeting, proposing the texts which were agreed on for her discussion and doing a lot of the talking.

Laurie, on the other hand, appeared to take on the negotiations as a duty, and regarded her (sporadic) participation in the group as secondary to her other activities which revolved around the Anti-Nazi League and a local group of Women Against Racism and Fascism, as well as the North London socialist feminist group. She rarely attended Collective meetings, and met Marianne, Louisa and the other active member of the core Collective, Belinda, for informal discussions before the group meeting at the Centre; they also met at each other's homes and sometimes at the meetings of the larger North London socialist feminist grouping.

Laurie’s primary identification was with this group, rather than the Centre. When asked what they did there, she replied ‘We’re trying to be feminist and socialist at the same time. Trying to act politically, instead of just talking’. Her involvement in the negotiations to secure the survival of the Centre stemmed from a wider perception of political action.

For these three women, the group functioned as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself; for Marianne and Louisa it was important as part of the Centre’s feminist politics but for Laurie its significance was as a basis
for socialist feminist politics. For Clare and Sandy the group was both relevant to their occupations and provided a welcome alternative political space to their workplaces (and in Clare's case, living quarters also).

Although Clare was also an initiator of the movement, she maintained a fairly low profile in the group context and at the Centre generally, although she kept the list of contact telephone numbers for the group. She related to other Centre users in a markedly more personal and informal way than the other group members. On one occasion when I failed to attend a meeting, she telephoned to find out if I needed a baby sitter. She frequently asked Ann about her studies. Her role in the group was an enabling one rather than an organising one, and was presumably related to her role at the Women's Refuge, where keeping the peace among the women and children there as well as handling confrontations between irate visiting (or 'marauding' in her term) husbands and their wives. In the more recent idiom of Women's Centres during the eighties, she was a 'facilitator'.

Sandy was occupationally engaged in efforts to convince her male colleagues in the National Association of Local Government Officers to fight for the implementation of the legislation on Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities. Her anecdotes about her work told of problems with colleagues rather than management. The appeal of the group for her was evidently that it took feminist precepts for granted, which her socialist colleagues at her workplace clearly
Ann, the final member of the group, was committed to feminist socialism. Unlike the other group members, she had become familiar with feminism while still at school. For her, it represented a well-established phenomenon. She did not know the history of the Centre or the movement and did not seem interested in either. She rarely attended Collective meetings. For her, the Centre was just the place where a socialist feminist group met. As the negotiations for a new site became a general topic of informal conversation before and after group meetings and the pressure to leave the Centre by the end of the year (1978) increased, she too was drawn in to the Centre community and attended a few Collective meetings.

The routes by which the socialist feminist group members came to the Centre and the movement were varied. The amount of information divulged by the women concerned also varied. As noted in 1.5, it was the socialist feminist group which defined my position at the Centre as that of a feminist rather than a researcher; to some extent, their answers to my questions were framed in terms of my status as a Centre user and restricted to a general level while, in turn, my questions were framed in terms of their involvement in the Women’s Movement and their routes to the Centre.

Their stories about how they came to the Centre were told in terms of their participation in other political/intellectual formations rather than in terms of
their family positions, workplace experiences or personal lives.

They rarely talked about their personal lives in general conversation; collectivities rather than individuals were their main concern. It proved difficult to elicit much information on their motives for participating in the women's movement or the Centre. To them it was self evident that once discovered, feminism provided a means for the struggle for justice and equality, in which every thinking woman should be involved.

For this reason, there is not much data on the everyday lives of most of the feminist socialists. Marianne came to London as a student, was involved in the New Left and radical political cultures from which women's liberation emerged, and had recently bought a house in Camden Town together with three friends. She did not discuss her personal or family relationships, but said she lived in a 'communal house'.

Louisa lived in a private sector unfurnished rented flat; her parents also lived in London, and on occasion she mentioned that she visited them. Clare's family lived in South East London, and she visited them regularly. Sandy did not discuss her living arrangements or her family, but claimed a working class family of origin, and mentioned her younger sister whom she was encouraging to continue her education. Ann rented a room in West Hampstead, and stayed in London in the vacations apart
from travelling over the summer. She did not discuss her family either.

Laurie was slightly more forthcoming. She came to London from Nottingham, from a professional family of origin, shared an unfurnished flat with her brother for a while and then moved to another flat shared with a friend. Both she and her brother considered themselves socialists, but she became politically active in the demonstrations against the Vietnam war in 1968 and 1969 and encountered feminism in this context.

She joined a consciousness-raising group, and then the socialist feminist group at the invitation of Marge, one of the women who began the socialist feminist group, who she had met in the Anti-Vietnam War Campaign.

As noted earlier, she was interested in organising political action; her comments on the nature of groups and activities are interesting. Discussing the practice of the consciousness-raising group members of participating in demonstrations she said: 'We went as a group because we were quite good friends as a group. I mean not because we were a group but because we were friends'. When asked which came first, the group or the friendship she replied 'We met at the group'. The function of the earlier group was to provide a basis for friendship, and it was 'as friends' that the women actively participated in street politics.

At the Centre, the function of the group was perceived as providing a context for political analysis as a basis
for developing strategy. The group meeting outside the Centre was where the action was organised ('We’re trying to act politically'). It was with members of this group, not the Centre group, that Laurie socialised, and she ranked the organisation of collective political action more highly than the analytical discussions.

The political orientations and tactics of the socialist feminist group as a whole were more closely aligned to those of institutional politics than those of the other women and their social networks extended into other political groupings: party-politics, ‘New Left’ groups, trade unions and local organisations. Nevertheless, as discussed in 6.4 they were committed to maintaining the Centre as a space for women only, and identified themselves as feminists who were also socialists rather than feminist socialists. They all identified with the Centre community at the movement when it was threatened with being merged (or submerged, in their perception) with the Kings Cross Centre despite an objective allegiance to the broader communities of feminism and socialism.

The social networks of these women traversed institutional politics as well as the political cultures of the New Left and the intellectual field. They were prepared to activate these networks as social resources for feminism and for the Centre in particular. To some extent, Sandy and Laurie mobilised feminist analysis and tactics as resources in their socialist and anti-racist activities, but to them, like the others, feminism implied
these. The distinctions which they made between talk and action, feminism and socialism, related to the social and cultural milieux in which one or the other was taken as a priority, rather than a distinction between talk and action or feminism and socialism as such.

Their guiding rationale could be summarised as socialist feminist praxis. They perceived the Centre as a valuable, even necessary, social and cultural environment structured by feminism in its diversity. This underlay their identification with the Centre community and the movement from a socialist-feminist 'we' to a Riley House 'we' when the existence of the Centre community was threatened.

4.1.2 The Women's Therapy Group

The Women’s Therapy group related as a group and as individuals to the Centre in ways markedly different from the socialist feminists. None had participated in political groups or organizations before joining a feminist group; further although one of them, Belinda, effectively constituted the fourth member of the core Collective she did not participate in meetings with local councillors or officials. Rather, she spoke informally to a councillor whom she knew socially, and liaised with the other women involved by telephone or by visiting them at home.

Four women met regularly in this group, Belinda, Viv,
Jo and Ellen. Another woman, Linda, attended occasionally. As noted earlier, Belinda participated in day to day organisation of the Centre on her own terms, but explicitly distanced herself from 'the organised movement'. She also claimed to be in sympathy with radical feminism, although she did not align herself with any concrete radical feminist group. Viv and Jo were involved in the group but rarely attended Collective meetings; Ellen was a regular although not frequent participant in Collective meetings and the affairs of the Centre. Linda often visited the Centre, and attended Collective meetings but was not a member of any particular group.

These women discussed their routes to the Centre in terms of their personal histories; it proved difficult to disentangle the stories of their encounters with feminism and women's therapy from their stories of their marriages, divorces and unfulfilled desires. For them, the personal was political and the objective of social change was subordinated to, or perhaps the outcome of, 'personal change'. While Viv, Jo and Belinda joined consciousness-raising groups in the early years of the movement, their encounters with feminism were recounted in terms of their personal circumstances rather than the history of feminism or their experience of any other political group.

Joe and Viv were both divorced; Jo had two children. Ellen was married with one child. The other women were single and had no children. Again, all were English,
although Belinda grew up in Canada. She and Viv never completed higher education; Ellen and Belinda did. Linda left school at fifteen and worked at a series of jobs in a clerical capacity.

In terms of occupation, Jo had a 'straight job' in the private sector, Belinda worked as a deputy director of a national charity, Ellen taught in a college of Further Education and Viv let out rooms in her house (which she acquired on divorce). Belinda was also buying a flat, Ellen and her family lived in a council flat in a house in a 'mixed' area of housing and Jo and Linda rented flats in the private sector. All except Linda came from families with professional fathers. In terms of occupation, families of origin, income and housing tenure, the women in this group could, with the exception of Linda all be assessed as 'middle-class'; (and Belinda, Jo and Viv often were assessed and referred to as such by other Centre users).

Jo and Viv told the stories of their lives on three occasions, when we met at Viv's house, and these stories were organised around their parents' expectations of them and their own lack of purpose as young women. Viv describes her initial decision to go to a consciousness-group meeting in Kentish Town in terms which are reminiscent of religious conversion; she decided to 'try' feminism when she perceived an American acquaintance of hers to be transformed by her own involvement in feminism.

I went to a party and met somebody who was in the very first women's group and she told me about it - she was in the Tufnell Park group.
I had seen her a few years earlier being very submissive to this great editor John Silkin who edits the Star. She helped him. Then I met her with another boyfriend, and she was pregnant and looked very happy and had broken out of the other relationship where she had been very submissive. She was like a new woman.

On the basis of this encounter, she went to a meeting which was advertised outside the Town Hall. The circumstances to which she returned in her stories were as those which prompted her decision were those of her marriage.

When I had my first child my comment was, nobody ever told me what it was going to be like, being stuck at home inside four walls with a small child. But that has nothing to do with why I joined the movement. It had to do with marriage. I suddenly got to a point where I was revolving round my husband. He had just had his break-through and I just felt left nowhere and went around crying all the time, that is what got me in. I suddenly realised he had made it and I was no-one .... I was feeling dreadful and just went around crying. It was like a sudden realisation that everything I had been pushing was his, nothing to do with me, and I just exploded. The group was the place where I channelled it and sorted out my ideas.

Marriage rather than motherhood was perceived as the key factor in joining a feminist group. Before marriage, neither Jo nor Viv felt much sense of direction. Viv was not allowed by her parents to study medicine, her first choice of career, 'I ended up being a general student buming around for a year'. She failed a general degree, taught English in Paris for a while and 'Didn't do anything very much'.

Jo passed her degree ('in English Literature, of
course' - an ironic allusion to the popularity of English Literature with women undergraduates), worked as a research assistant and librarian and then married. She met Viv at a feminist meeting which she went to with a friend. Both, together with Ellen, moved to the Belsize Park Centre, and in 1973 ('when the psychology issue of Shrew came out') they formed a group to study and practice feminist therapies and co-counselling. At this point, Jo 'packed a suitcase, left Mark and went to sleep on Viv's settee'. She soon afterwards spent a year 'bumming around in France', returned and got her 'straight job', much to her parents approval. She was currently considering leaving it to go and work for a community Arts Centre.

For these two the consciousness-raising group served a source of strength and support. They both agreed that 'It gave me the support and strength to do something definite'. Viv also invited the group to meet regularly at her house, and used it tactically in her marital struggles.

I certainly used the group as a weapon to hit my husband with. By having a group of women meeting at the house, it was like an insult to what he had been having, like it was his house and his life. And I suddenly felt: right, this is my life, my thing, all these women are coming in. He felt it as a threat, and he felt very guilty at all the things I was coming out with.

The movement from consciousness-raising to therapy seemed to both women to be natural: 'It seemed to me take consciousness-raising on to another level'. Viv then studied counselling 'in the mainstream' and went into
therapy for several years. Interestingly, it was Reichian therapy - Reich was evidently popular with the women's therapy group as well as the socialist feminist group. Jo, on the other hand, went to France to 'work things out'. She recounted that year as a period of 'growing up', of achieving adult status.

I was very conscious of reliving my teenage years; twenty-six became sixteen - seventeen - eighteen. I was totally irresponsible for the first time. It was that whole thing about leaving the family and leaving the country I was brought up in. I hitched around Europe and finished up begging in the streets at one time, busking. At the end of that year .... I did not have anything left to fight against. When I had been married everything could be blamed on my husband, or it could be blamed on my family, or what have you. I'd spent a certain amount of time on my own, lived out all my fantasies .... I had to decide what I wanted, do something completely for myself.

At this point, Jo re-joined the therapy group.

Belinda also joined a women's therapy group in 1973, and then the one which met at Belsize Park. She too perceived its function as one of support, but stressed the functions of the therapeutic practices themselves for personal change:

It's a long unfolding, the way your awareness changes. You unfold in everyway, because you change the way you look at things.

Ellen claimed an academic interest women's therapy rather than acknowledging a personal need for it. She appeared to incorporate it into her 'feminist marriage', her teaching job and motherhood without difficulty. Linda's relationship to the group seemed to be just one
part of her general identification with the Centre, rather than one of central interest.

Belinda, Viv and Jo all drew significant distinctions between their version of feminism as providing a context, support and project for 'personal change' and 'Movement Women with capitals' on the one hand and 'the organised movement, like at National Conferences', on the other. Jo declared: 'I’m no longer a part of the organised movement. But I consider myself part of the Women’s movement as a whole, very much so; women moving towards change'. Viv associated Movement Women with 'preaching' and distinguished example and practice from rhetoric:

I think example is much more powerful, and much more difficult, I am actually very sceptical of people who preach because I think they aren’t quite sure of it.

The distinction drawn by Laurie between talk and action is echoed here, but personal action and changes in everyday life are seen as the objective, not collective action. Belinda summed up this position:

'If you are going to meetings and agitating and then go back to exactly the same life as before, there’s something missing'.

In this case too, the group is seen as a means to an end, but the end is achieved through individual participation in the group and in therapy, not through later action organised collectively. The women’s therapy groups - and consciousness-raising groups - were perceived by these women as distinct from the organised movement. The Centre was viewed as a crucial importance for 'The
women's movement as a whole', a site where women 'moving towards change' can meet one another, and join groups and thereby bring about changes in their personal lives.

This version of feminism draws heavily upon the 'revolution of consciousness' movements of the nineteen sixties and is kept distinct from institutionalised politics. The Centre was valued as the social site for the pursuit of change by individual women.

In the context of collective action, Belinda, Ellen and Linda participated in the demonstrations organised by the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), although not together. They all supported the negotiations with the Council and all identified with the Centre community. Jo attended National Conferences in the middle years of the decade, but then stopped. She reported on the last one she attended in 1977.

You heard the same old thing again and again and they were bitchy and vicious to each other. Not what I want. I came back with Maggy, who has been in the movement for a long time. We decided conference wasn't exciting any more, there was no great effect. I remember going four years ago and whew! I felt really high, but ... I don't know, maybe it's because we have moved on, or all the time we're just been gradually finding our own level.

The social networks of these women extended into 'mainstream' counselling and therapy and into other feminist groupings. They did not extend to Movement Women, and relations with women in the 'organised movement' were activated by three of the group only outside the organised sites.
None of the group proposed moving on from the Centre, however, although Viv and Ellen liaised with a group involved in setting up a Women's Therapy Centre in a neighbouring borough. The Centre at Riley House seemed at their 'level'.

4.1.3 Occasional Centre users

The 'occasional' Centre users as discussed in 5.4, cannot be clearly demarcated from feminist 'outsiders' who visit the Centre from time to time. As noted in the Introduction, Centre users are defined in this thesis as women who are recognised by the women attending more regularly as members of the Centre community of identification, and who identify with it. Three of these occasional users have been mentioned earlier; Linda, Marje and Kate. Of these three, Marje and Kate belong to the 'older generation' of feminists to whom I was referred for information about the current feminist landscape and the history of the Centre and the movement. Both had been involved in the Belsize Park Centre, and Marje had been one of the group of women who negotiated successfully for the Riley House site. Jenny, a single woman with a young child had also been active in the early days at Riley House, trying to keep the Centre open in the daytime.

The length of time over which they had been involved in the Centre ensured that they were known of by most Centre users if not personally known to them. They visited the
Centre to 'catch up' with events and individuals and in the case of Marje and Kate, to offer advice. Marje was paid organiser for the National Abortion campaign who had helped establish the feminist-socialist group. She also used her visits to mobilise the women to support the campaign. Kate had left the Centre before it was established on its current site, but was one of the initiators of the movement and still friendly with Marianne. She was married, had a child and was a part-time lecturer in the Polytechnic sector. She was no longer actively engaged in feminist politics, but maintained her social networks across the movement.

Linda, together with another unmarried woman, Jane, were also occasional Centre users. They came to the Centre to socialise, to 'keep up' with events and to support the efforts to maintain an independent existence for the Centre. They often left the Centre before the group meetings ended (although Linda did sometimes attend the Women's Therapy group, as mentioned) and did not offer much information about themselves, except that Jane lived near Linda.

Their participation in the Centre community was social rather than political in terms of its personal relevance. Participation in the Centre was a way of maintaining feminist social relations and being informed about other feminist developments, but the Centre was the only such social location in which they participated. They could be classified as Riley House feminists; there was no evidence
that they had any other feminists as friends or acquaintances.

The function of the Centre for all these women was primarily social; Marje and Kate could be mobilised as social resources by other Centre users; for Linda and Jane, and to some extent Jenny, the Centre functioned as a social resource. These five individuals used the Centre as a place to 'drop in' to, as a source of companionship and information, a site at which social relations could be re-activated. Again, as in the case of the groups, it was a site for a particular social milieu that the Centre was valued, even though it was used very differently by the two groups and the occasional Centre users.

The themes and issues which emerge from the biographical details of the Centre users and from their histories as feminists are examined in 6.2 below.

4.2 Marriage, motherhood and the negotiation of feminist identities

In order to proceed with the analysis of social differences among Centre users, it is necessary to focus upon their family positions and family relations, beginning with an examination of the positions of wives and mothers, their relevance to the initial decisions made by women to 'join' the movement and the particular groups in which they participated and their relations with other Centre users and the Centre community. As noted in 4.1.1,
these issues were not raised in a personal context in the socialist feminist group, but were discussed in their reading group on the family, described in chapter 5.

The experience of becoming a mother, together with the conventional sexual division of labour involved in childcare in the home and the lack of social provision of care for children under five years of age, is cited throughout the literature as a key reason for the development of the women’s movement and ‘second wave’ feminism, in addition to the increasing participation by women in the labour force. The social isolation and the financial dependence which were the frequent co-relates of being ‘stuck in the home within four walls’, in Viv’s phrase, were, it is argued, inconsistent with the rhetorical valorisation of women in the private sphere (discussed in 6.1). Many of the contributors to the early editions of *Shrew* and, to a lesser extent, *Spare Rib* reflected upon their position as mothers, and fulminated against it.

In the case of the Women’s Centre, the relatively low proportion of mothers was therefore initially surprising: I had expected a higher proportion of women with young children. As discussed in Chapter 6, the mothers among the Centre users related to their locality (and the locality of the Centre) was markedly different from the other women; their use of space was both subject to greater time constraints and structured to a greater extent by the organisation of social reproduction. The
Centre was used as part of this organisational structure by the local women who visited for advice and information.

Relatively few feminists with children regularly used the Centre; as noted earlier, they did not bring their children to the Centre. At least one mother who was actively involved in the Centre for the first few months after it was established at Riley House 'dropped out' of the Centre completely. On the other hand, when women discussed their earlier participation in consciousness-raising groups, they all mentioned the high proportion of women with children. To add to the complexity of the situation, none of the mothers at the Centre organised their discussions around questions of motherhood and none referred to it as a primary motive for 'joining' a feminist group. As quoted in 4.1 above, Viv explicitly claimed that her prime reason for initially attending the consciousness-raising group was marriage, not motherhood. Ellen, Kate and Jane did not mention their position as mothers as central to their identification with feminism or as a reason for participating in (or having formerly participated in) a specific group.

In the case of Ellen and Viv in the Women's therapy group there is an emphasis upon 'personal change' and the individual as distinct from social change and the collective dimension of feminist politics. This also appears to be a characteristic of the consciousness-raising group which withdrew from the Centre and all of whom were mothers. While the reason which these women
gave for withdrawing from the Centre was the presence of a radical lesbian group at a Collective meeting, the relations between their position as mothers, their withdrawal from the Centre to meet in the private domain of each other's homes and the emphasis upon personal change also need to be examined.

The consciousness-raising group was composed of three women who met regularly as a group, Pat, Lena and Ingrid, and a fourth woman, Edie, who participated less frequently in group meetings but who associated regularly with the other women, in varying combinations, as a friend. All the women were mothers, as noted above, and all but Pat were divorced. They initially met at a meeting in a house in a street near Swiss Cottage, the area where Lena and Ingrid regularly shopped.

The group initially numbered between ten and fifteen women and then settled at around seven. The stories of Lena, Ingrid and Pat are significant in terms of the relative stress which they lay on their marital relations, their position as mothers, and their general perceptions of gender relations in their decision to join a feminist group.

Lena and Ingrid initially stressed the problems with motherhood which was experienced by the group members and the significance of motherhood for their initial decisions to join.

Ingrid: Paul and I had both been students and had the
same kind of life. Suddenly I was at home with two children under two and my life was so different from Paul’s, who went out all day, and suddenly women’s lib seemed very relevant .... And when Candida was about six months - the *Female Eunuch* came out then, I think, in 1970 - and I just read that and suddenly the movement came along at that time and it seemed relevant to join then. I thought it was fantastic; it really was. Within two months I was deep in it, had an extra-marital affair ... I don’t know, everything was happening.

Lena: What in fact held the group together - and pissed off the women who weren’t married and had no children was the fact that we talked a lot about children and our first experiences, and sometimes our second and in one case a third. About being a mother alone with a child and that was very important, wasn’t it? At the time. And a very shocking experience for all of us.

Questions of motherhood evidently dominated discussions at the group in the early days. In addition to Pat, Lena and Ingrid, (English, Welsh and Danish respectively) two unmarried American women, a married English woman and a married Japanese woman were also mothers. The interesting point in Ingrid’s story however, is that the effects of
motherhood are noted in relation to her changing relationship to her husband Paul, and the divergence of their lifestyles.

The husbands were instrumental in the decisions of all four women to join the movement. Like Viv (quoted in 6.1) Edie used her participation in the group from 1971 onwards as a weapon against her husband. The other three women were encouraged by their husbands to participate.

Lena: [The husbands] were quite trendy. They all wanted us to go to Women's Lib and be radical.

Pat: Yes, exactly. I mean, I went along quite apprehensive. I'm not a group person. I don't feel at ease in large groups. I mean I half went for my own benefit and half because Colin said "go on, you will be a much better person". Very soon he realised he was not going to get anything out of it.

Ingrid: Very soon they all felt threatened, but they were very keen at first. Then they were very keen at first. Then they were very keen at putting obstacles in our way.

Pat: But it backfired on mine. He suggested it to make me more of a person, get out of the house, but I mean, very soon ... because I went along not realising all the ways I was dominated by him - he is a very dominating personality - and I quickly realised just how dominated I was.
And through talking to the others, I found that all the things I had thought about doing weren't so crazy after all.

Marital relations were perceived, in the context of motherhood, as the key issue. Six of the married group members divorced, or began divorce proceedings while participating in the group. Momoko, the Japanese woman withdrew from the group and had another child. In Ingrid's words:

The support of the group was tremendous, and six of us used it to get out of bad marriages.

Pat remained married and continued to participate in the group. Like the women's therapy group members, these women found the group a source of support and used it to facilitate 'personal change'. Ingrid explicitly contrasted the personal involvement of the women in the group with other groups which she perceived as being about 'socialist theory'.

I think we made our group a very good group because we did not just talk socialist theory, how we wanted the world to be, but we actually felt very strongly .... We were very committed. We did come every week and sat up to 2.00 or 3.00 [a.m.] often. We had small babies then; it really was a big thing for us to stay up that late.

The most obvious functions of the group for these women, like Viv and Jo in the Women's Therapy group, was the support which it provided for the resolution of marital problems and its function in initiating friendships between the women. The family relations which
were perceived as in need of resolution were *intra*-generational, marital relations rather than mother-child relations in the case of the consciousness-raising group. In the case of Viv and Jo of the Women's Therapy group, it was *inter*-generational relations which were at issue, too, but with parents rather than children. Here the position of daughter as well as wife was taken to be problematic. The title of an article in a 1973 edition of *Shrew* summarised the position: 'We are all some-one's daughter or some-one's wife'. Motherhood, taken as a crucial position in much of the literature, did not figure in the title or the article cited; the article focussed upon the problems involved in the allocation of social class to women.

Two questions arise from this emphasis upon the positions of wife and daughter to the exclusion of that of mother: first, whether this exclusion was a contributory factor in the withdrawal of the consciousness-raising group from the Centre and the low proportion of mothers in the Centre community. Secondly, what was the motivation of the women in those groups which functioned to support 'personal change' to continue to participate in them after the re-organisation of their family relationships.

In relation to the first question, Viv expressed the view that concrete social support for mothers was not generally available at the Centre.

> I think the support breaks down at that point. I find it quite distressing that at places like the Centre there is a certain discrimination. Like, children, they are very much your own problem at a general level ...
there really is a line between those who have children and those who haven't. It's another world. It's easy to be liberated if you're single, comparatively. The real crux is when you have children.

None of the other women expressed disaffection with the Centre or the movement on these terms however, Ellen, Kate and Jane did not discuss motherhood as a problem in relation to the Centre (or the Centre as problematic in relation to motherhood). On the other hand, the mothers who withdrew may well have experienced a lack of 'support'.

The distinction between the mothers who experienced difficulty in participating in feminist groups on account of their motherhood and those who did not hinges on the age of the children. This in turn is related to the social age of the mothers and a particular point in the life cycle of their households. For women with children under school age, motherhood is often experienced as 'shocking' particularly when the children were first or second children. This was the point at which all the mothers at the Centre and the consciousness-raising group joined the movement although, as argued earlier, it was the impact of motherhood on their marital relations which was perceived as the key issue. It was also the point at which discussions of motherhood dominated meetings and action for childcare was privileged. The motivation to get involved at this point of a career as mother with campaigns for local nurseries and other childcare facilities is obvious.
It is also the period during which it is most difficult to organise regular participation in the groups and campaigns however.

It is at the point when children are attending school and the women are established in their position of a mother that it ceases to be a central issue for the women concerned. During the period of fieldwork all the children of the Centre users and the consciousness-raising group were of school age. It is also at this point when the women are well established as mothers, that the differences between the mothers and the women without children become less significant.

For this reason, it is very unlikely that their position as mothers underlay the decision of the consciousness-raising group to withdraw from the Centre. For the same reason, it is necessary to examine the changing relations between women and the movement in relation to the particular points in their life-cycles which correspond to changes in their feminist practices and orientations. This relates to the second question raised earlier concerning the motivation of the consciousness-raising group to continue to meet once they had resolved their marital problems. Once their children were at school and their new living arrangements in place, the collective dimension of feminist politics emerged with a higher profile. Lena contextualised her decision to join a feminist group by reference to a longstanding perception of unjust and unequal gender relations; it was
such perceptions which re-emerged more generally as the children grew older.

I was very Women's Libby at the age of eleven. I stormed out of Sunday School saying: I am not coming back until there's a woman Prime Minister, or something. I was furious about everything as a child and I never thought that any other women felt the same, so [the group] was a real eye-opener. I was always Women's Lib but it didn't have a name.

By the period of fieldwork, she and the other members were attending more demonstrations, open meetings and parliamentary lobbies, particularly for the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital and the National Abortion campaign. They did not perceive this as 'political' however, because they did not go as a group, but with one or two of the other women as friends. For them, 'politics' involved acting on an institutionalised group basis. On this basis, they saw themselves as a friendship group of feminists, rather than a movement group. They described their friendship in feminist terms, however.

Ingrid: We still have sisterly solidarity. We still have each other.

Lena: In a way, we're still a feminist group, aren't we.

Ingrid: Yes, but not institutionalised like at the Centre.

In their movement from an individual-focused version of feminism to a collectively-oriented one, the women in this
group used feminist venues only to obtain information on collective action in which they (sometimes) participated; when they did so, they participated as individuals with friends.

In relation to this mode of action the women were not as different from the socialist feminists as they appeared at first sight. As noted in 4.1 several of the latter participated in other groups and activities with friends or acquaintances rather than as a group. Often, the consciousness-group women joined any socialist feminists from the Centre when they met at a rally or lobby (and vice versa). The significant distinction here is that they participated as socialist feminists, not as individual feminists without any particular political affiliation to any feminist tendency or organisation.

A history of having shared the Centre functioned permit a perception of the consciousness-raising group by other Centre users as affiliated to the Centre - although not of the Centre community - and was a significant factor in the identification of the group members with the Centre when it was threatened with closure, as discussed in Chapter 7.

To summarize the shared social positions and social differences which emerge as significant at the Centre, these are firstly, a history of participation or non-participation in the intellectual field and the associated sites of socialist and radical politics and secondly, family positions and family relations.

Participation in the social locations from which
women's liberation emerged and in the social locations which developed out of these (in the form of socialist groupings more closely aligned to institutionalised politics than their predecessors of the nineteen sixties) was a factor common to many centre users. This is clearly the case for the socialist feminists, except for the youngest woman, Ann, who grew up in the cultural environment in which a socialist version of feminism was prevalent.

It is also the case for some women in other groups, although their access to the field was mediated by their husbands; Ingrid, Lena and Pat in the consciousness-raising group, presented their husbands as 'trendy' self-designated radicals. This participation needs to be distinguished from participation in higher education; several women, as noted above, were undergraduates but were not involved in the political-cultural dimensions of the intellectual field. Educational qualifications in themselves were not significant factors; participation in particular concrete social locations and social networks was. It should be added however, that all the Centre users were 'habitual readers' and membership of this category implies both a high degree of literacy and the inheritance or adoption of a culture of reading in which reading is experienced as a pleasurable activity. As argued in 5.1 this criterion applies to all feminists in the British context, but it is a cultural rather than a social factor.
The second feature which many women shared was the subjective experience of marital relations as problematic, usually (although not always) subsequent to the birth of at least one child. The relations at issue were primarily intra-generational rather than inter-generational. This perspective on the marital relations of women who joined feminist groups is not stressed in the literature on the women's movement, which focuses on the inequality of the sexual division of labour in the domestic context (as well as the context of employment) and the financial dependence of wives in the analysis of the discontent of married women.

The women at the Centre and the consciousness-raising group who were - or had been - married, stressed social and emotional dependence and a lack of purpose rather than the burdens of domestic labour and childcare or financial dependence. The literature also stresses the 'generational politics' of the movement and its roots in the reaction of a younger generation of women against their parents' ways of life (Mitchell, 1986). This was referred to by Viv and Jo, but not stressed by other women; indeed, several explicitly claimed that they were 'close' to their mothers, a few mentioned an aunt, and two women, Pat and Ingrid, a mother-in-law (or former mother-in-law) as supportive figures in their invariably women-centred kindred.

The third point which needs to be stressed at this point is that the groups in which the women participated
and the versions of feminism which they espoused varied according to different points in the life cycle of those women. In the case of the consciousness-raising group, the women who remained active moved from an individually to a collectively oriented politics as their children grew older and their new living arrangements were settled. In the case of the Women's Therapy group, occupational or 'career' matters began to be linked to feminism as the children grew older, with Viv training as a counsellor, Jo considering changing her job and finding a more 'fulfilling' occupation and Ellen continuing to relate issues of feminist therapy to her teaching. In the case of the socialist feminists, any changes in their feminist positions concurrent with marriage or motherhood remained to be seen.¹

The social differences were accommodated at the Centre; the mothers of very young children were not often present and not fully integrated however. It was women without children and 'established' mothers who negotiated feminist identities which did not conflict and subsumed their different feminist positions in their shared commitment to the Centre as a site which they all valued.

¹ At least two of the women moved into local government and were employed by the Greater London council with a brief which included 'women's issues'. No data on their changing family relationships is available, except in the case of Laurie who married a political refugee and had a child.
5. COMMUNICATION NETWORKS, THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND THE WOMEN’S CENTRE

The discussion of the routes taken by Centre users to the Women’s Movement and Riley House presented in chapter 4 notes that for many of the women books or articles played a significant part in their decision to ‘join’ the Movement or the Centre. Chapters 2 and 3 pointed out the role of published texts – print commodities – in extending the embryonic feminist entelechy beyond the enclaves of the women’s liberation groups and the social networks of the intellectual and political fields.

5.1 examines in detail the interplay of oral, print and electronic technologies of communication in the context of the formation of the women’s movement, the legitimisation of particular versions of feminism in the discursive formation and the mobilisation of a feminist constituency. In 5.2 I return to a consideration of the functions of the different modes of communication in play at the Women’s Centre in the construction and maintenance of a distinctive feminist community and informal power relations, against the background outlined in 5.1.

Almost all of the Women’s Centre users apart from the founders claimed that their first encounter with women’s liberation or the women’s movement was through books – books which they had read, or ‘heard about’. Books had an unexpectedly high profile in all the accounts given by
Centre users of their initial decision to attend the Centre or another feminist organization.

A number of routes to the movement have been documented in feminist literature; several cite their attendance at a feminist 'event' at a counter-cultural venue, such as the 'Anti-University' of the late 1960s, as publicised in the alternative or underground press, or on fly posters (Rowland 1985; Wandor, 1972). Others cite attendance at the women's organization at which women's liberation speakers intervened such as the Housewives Register (Oakley, 1982), or a tenants association meeting or trade union meeting (Rowbotham, 1972). Many were taken by a friend who had already 'heard' of feminism through one of these routes. In addition to these social routes, however, women also cite books or magazine articles as key factors in their decision to attend movement meetings, with some referring to these as a source of 'revelation' (Wilson, 1986, p. 4; Coote and Campbell, 1982; Rowland, 1985).

Many of the Women's Centre users at Riley House followed up notices advertising meetings, which were pinned up in Libraries or Department of Health and Social Security Offices, flyposted to walls or shopwindows, or attached to lamp posts in local high streets. This colonization of public spaces is discussed in Chapter 6, and is itself one example of the communicative practices by which women were recruited to particular groups and Centres, but the role of such advertising in recruitment
proves to be secondary, not primary in the case of the women at Riley House. The women who actually attended the groups and the Women’s Centre were initially motivated by books which they had read.

These women claimed that they were already aware of the movement from books which they had chosen to read before they ‘heard about’ the movement from friends, acquaintances and public speakers. According to a number of published testimonies, access to published books which were easily available at bookshops, played a crucial part in introducing women to the emergent women’s liberation movement and in mobilising a community of identification among geographically dispersed women, many of whom had no direct access to the social milieux in which the movement was initiated, many being in relative isolation as mothers of young children.

5.1 Communication networks and social relations

The centrality of communication networks in the mobilisation of social movements, and their listing as a condition of that mobilisation was noted in 3.3. As Rowbotham argues,

‘Movements develop in the process of communicating themselves. The forms of communication consequently define considerably their shape and direction’ (Rowbotham, 1969, p. 7).

It is also clear that the forms of communication which are
employed - forms of language usage, performance, visual imagery - crucially structure the development of the movement. Communication practices and in particular language, are at the heart of feminist political practice. From the first stirrings of the women's liberation movement, women were perceived as 'silent', 'muted'; the feminist project was organized around 'breaking the silence' (Rowbotham, 1969, 1973). 'Liberation is speaking out, making contact' (Cameron, 1985, p. 5). The means and technologies of communication, and the networks or circuits of exchange through which specific communications circulate are, however, treated as unproblematic in accounts of the women's movement and the new social movements in general except in so far as they have to compete with the mass media (Castells, 1983; Mattelart, 1980; Touraine, 1981). Given the number of competing feminist discourses available, however, (the different 'women's voices' speaking) these issues have to be addressed in order to establish which 'voices' achieved authority, and in which locations.

In feminist accounts it is taken as self evident that once the word was out, through unspecified networks, feminism tapped a vein of frustration widespread among a generation of women who were trapped in ideologies of domesticity and inherited definitions of feminity while structural changes and other emergent cultures generated a sense, albeit unarticulated, of different possibilities and wider horizons (Evans, 1979; Rowland 1985; Rowbotham,
1972, Mitchell, 1984; Coote and Campbell, 1982).

Sheila Rowbotham's recent history of the movement does recount in detail the ways in which spontaneous protests and the frustrations of diverse groups of women meshed with the 'new politics' of women's liberation, with its identification of sexual politics as operating across and outside of political institutions and apparatuses, and its central point, 'The personal is political' (Rowbotham, 1989). What is not addressed in any detail is the nature of the networks of communication used, and the different and unequal access to them for different groups of women.

It is argued here that the different networks of communication by which 'the word' spread need to be distinguished in any examination of the social organisation of the women's movement, at both national and local levels. Firstly, the term 'Communications network' is itself problematic because its associations with cybernetic models of communication evoke a model of communication in which the 'network' is viewed as primarily a means of imparting information. As discussed in 2.3, feminist practice developed in the process of contesting and re-negotiating specific meanings, from particular items of vocabulary to specific forms of language-use (sexist jokes, assertions, etc.).

Given the struggles over the everyday use of language which characterised feminist practice and the specific project of formulating a 'language of the oppressed' (Rowbotham, 1969) which articulates women's experiences
and involves the contesting dominant frames of interpretation, communication has to be seen as part of the struggle rather than merely a means of imparting information.

It is also necessary to distinguish between oral communication and textual communication, the first along social networks, the second by other routes as well. It is also important, in the case of the women’s movement to distinguish between mass-produced books and articles destined for mass consumption - print as a commodity - small-circulation publications produced by the alternative or ‘underground’ press, and unpublished papers circulated in photocopy form together with extracts from papers or manifestoes published abroad and unobtainable for most people.

This latter category of texts were passed between women at feminist group meetings and at conferences and seminars. Social networks functioned as circuits of exchange for written texts as well as constituting ‘chains of gossip’. The circulation of texts along the social networks of the initiators of women’s liberation served to cement the social relations of the women concerned as well as to diffuse the ‘new politics’. These networks functioned as restricted circuits of exchange; they consolidated political theories and contesting dominant modes of representation but did not diffuse ‘second wave feminism’ far beyond the enclaves of radical and New Left political culture.
The publication of feminist articles in the alternative press noted in 3.4 provided a means of extending the circuits of communication but only to those who already participated in or had access to intellectual and counter-cultural fields which provided the bulk of their readership (Nelson, 1989). The messages circulated by means of these publications did not reach most of the women on whose behalf the initiators of women's liberation claimed to speak.

It was through the publication of books produced for mass consumption and widely distributed through the shops and libraries from which the reading public obtain their books and magazines as a matter of course that contemporary feminism 'went public' and the discursive formation of feminism was established.

Publication also conferred authority for widespread market distribution both upon the arguments and positions which they put forward, and upon the authors. It provided not only a means for diffusing feminism, but also a route to achieving legitimacy for 'women's voice'. The power of the written word, and its legitimating function was grasped by the women themselves; Sheila Rowbotham reflected that

'just having something down on paper meant you didn't feel either a hopeless rage or a neurotic freak' (Rowbotham, 1972, p. 93).

Transcription involves rationalisation; publication, however, while not acknowledged explicitly by Rowbotham, is a key element in the process of cultural legitimation.

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The difference between writing for the broadsheets of the alternative left and underground press and for publication through established publishing houses is not lost on Elizabeth Wilson, another feminist with several mainstream publications to her credit, she recalls her early writings as being prompted by the opening up of

'a new space to write in new ways about new or unacknowledged experiences',

and adds

'I never dreamt that this *samizdat* production had set me on the road to mainstream publishing' (Wilson, 1986, p. 4).

The first quotation emphasises the importance of new 'signifying spaces' as well as new social spaces in the development of the movement, (Kristeva, 1987). The second quotation also underlines the fact that it is not just the distinction between speech and writing, oral and textual communication which is relevant to the development of social movements, but technologies of production and distribution.

As noted in chapter 2, the development of the women's movement through the mass production of feminist texts and their distribution through the commodity market has to be viewed not only in terms of its function in legitimating feminism and extending it beyond the enclaves in which it originated, but also in terms of its function in mobilising an image of communion, an imagined community of
feminism - 'sisterhood'.

Community is best understood as the effect of an identification which positions individuals as members of a group of comparables or counterparts; it is the outcome of a process of collective identification which functions through claims for and attributions of identity. The different networks by which publications were circulated, involved different textual strategies and different ways of addressing readers, which in turn influenced the ways in which the readers identified with the author and with other 'ideal' readers.

The two extracts quoted below indicate the differences in ideal readership, forms of address, and textual strategies involved in publication in a small scale alternative publication with restricted circulation, and a publication for distribution through retail outlets by a mainstream publisher, in a paperback edition.

'The revolutionary who is serious must listen very carefully to the people who are not heard and who do not speak .... Communication for people who have no name, who have not been recognized, who have not known themselves is a difficult business. For women it is especially difficult' (Rowbotham, 1969, p. 3).

'The language of theory - removed language - only expressed a reality experienced by the oppressors. It speaks only for their world, from their point of view. Ultimately, a revolutionary movement has to break the hold of the dominant group over theory .... We can't just occupy existing words. We have to change the meanings even before we take them over (Rowbotham, 1973, pp. 32-33).

The first passage constitutes an appeal, or warning, to
an ideal reader constructed as a (male) 'revolutionary', and speaks on behalf of the silent, the unrecognized, - women - in the third person. It is not directly addressing women. The second passage not only addresses women and constitutes them as the revolutionaries, but through the use of the first person plural invites the identification of a (female) readership. The shift from the communications networks of the New Left and radical political presses to those of the general book market corresponds to a shift in forms of address and textual strategy, although the subject matter and content of both passages remain the same.

The second passage interpellates women as the oppressed, and functions to mobilise a collective identification of women as both an oppressed group and potential revolutionaries. The second passage would not (did not) achieve publication in the alternative press but was viewed by the established publishing house (Penguin) as having a large market. Commercial publishing, ironically, proved more amenable to the 'revolutionary movement' which addressed women than the self-designated broadsheets of the Left.

The relations of the alternative left presses - OZ, IT, and Friends/Frendz1 with women's liberation from its formal

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1 These magazines can be classified as 'alternative Left' publications. All three magazines shifted perceptibly from the ethos of 'phun' and personal liberation in the early years of publication to an advocacy of collective action and political revolution at the turn of the decade, and began to propose an alliance with the working classes (Nelson, 1989).
foundation in 1970 were ambivalent, and provide an example of the tensions between feminism and the older Left groupings through their published articles. *IT* acknowledged some aspects of women's liberation but did not attempt to grapple with the issues raised by the movement.

*Friends*, on the other hand, in their review of the *Female Eunuch* stated

>'most people, including even chicks (sorry Germaine) ... would consider themselves fairly emancipated; the idea of Women's Liberation is a joke, and a rather bad one at that' (1970, Issue no. 18, p. 13).

*OZ*, the third 'underground' magazine itself manifested an ambivalent attitude to women's liberation. It acknowledged that 'the underground can no longer go on evading the issue' (of women's liberation) (1975, *OZ* no. 36, p. 25). However, it continued to print pictures and articles which prompted one reader to label it 'a sort of "Underground Playboy"' (*OZ*, no. 39, p. 3).

Nevertheless, feminist publications claimed these magazines as their progenitors. A founding editor of *Spare-Rib*, the women's liberation magazine claimed:

>'Spare Rib was begun because of the impetus of the women's liberation movement, but was also a daughter of the underground press' (Rowe, 1984, p. 13).

The movement away from the alternative left presses then coincided with the movement of the initiators of women's liberation away from their field of emergence. The publication of feminist books then, opened up new
spaces for new textual strategies contributing to the construction of images of communion for large numbers of geographically dispersed women who did not have access to or a disposition for the counter cultures of the New Left. This imagined community of feminism, as discussed earlier, constituted one of the constituencies for feminist organizations, including the Women's Centre at Riley House, by providing the means by which the minimal criteria for inclusion as 'a feminist' could be learned.

The single publication which was most frequently cited by women at the Riley House who 'joined' the movement during the first two years, 'the period of education and propaganda' as Rowbotham terms it (Rowbotham, 1972), is Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963), followed by Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate* (1971) which was published by Penguin and therefore was relatively cheap in price and widely available, and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), which achieved wider press coverage and reviews.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1961) were also cited as key texts which disposed the women to visit the Centre, join a consciousness-raising group, or generally 'check out' women's liberation. Marianne, a member of the core Collective recalled contributing to an early edition of *Shrew*, one of the first women’s liberation broadsheets, but viewed the publication of *Women’s Estate* (Mitchell, 1971) as a milestone in the history of the movement.
The publication of feminist articles in established periodicals such as *New Society* and *The New Statesman* from 1970 onwards was also important in diffusing feminism among the liberally inclined fractions of their readership who were among those pre-disposed towards new political ventures.¹ At Riley House, articles from these periodicals were regularly discussed by the Centre users, and they were also discussed by Centre users with other people, outside the Women's Centre, in attempts to explain their espousal of feminism.

The establishment of *Spare-Rib* in 1972 (a women's liberation magazine which achieved distribution through the W.H. Smith retail chain) was instrumental in extending the networks and in fostering the 'image of communion' among its widely dispersed readership. Almost every Riley House user was familiar with it, and a regular reader.

It is worth returning to the role of books and articles in mobilising the women's movement in relation to the class composition of the movement, and of the Women's Centre. The emphasis on books implies a high rate of literacy among the movement's constituency; it also implies the existence of what Elizabeth Eisenstein has termed a category of 'habitual readers' (Eisenstein, 1981, pp. 35-38). This does not imply a social group with a capacity to engage with difficult texts, or the possession of the cultural capital specified as a necessary condition

¹ This conclusion is derived from the content of articles published in these periodicals, editorials, and their regular publicity for 'left' political events and organizations.
for upward social mobility by Halsey (Halsey, 1978) or for the achievement of 'functional weight' in the intellectual field (Bourdieu, 1971). Rather, it is defined in terms of reading constituting an element of everyday life, and providing pleasure or gratification.

The generation of women from whom the movement derived its members was, as noted in 3.2, the post-Beveridge generation who had been subjected to an ideological focus on education as a route to social mobility. The habitual readers who formed the constituency for the women's liberation movement were, for the most part, former grammar school girls who became aware that while the absolute rate of upward social mobility increased during the nineteen sixties, neither the relative rate of mobility (assessed in terms of occupation without reference to gender) nor the rate of mobility for women in relation to men, showed any significant increase (Heron, 1985; Steedman, 1986).

This generation of women constituted the first television generation; they also however inhabited a highly literate culture; Eisenstein's 'typographical culture' (Eisenstein, 1981; 1983). Throughout the nineteen seventies, consumer spending on books rose consistently ahead of inflation. Between forty and forty-five thousand titles were published every year (Euromonitor, 1979). A survey carried out at the end of the decade in London indicated that forty-five per cent of the respondents claimed to be reading a book at the time
(Warpole, 1984, p. 3); reading was for many a part of everyday life.

Book reading was a habit instituted during the formative years of this generation of women, and its grammar-school educated units in particular, and habitual reading continued into the seventies.

Reading by women has specific cultural connotations; it has been identified as a potentially subversive activity, by means of which the private sphere and domestic spaces identified as 'a woman's place' could open up to the public sphere, depending upon the books available (Lovell, 1985). Further, reading - as an activity - can be pursued at a variety of times throughout the day, in the intervals between childcare and housework, between waged work, and, for public transport users, during travelling times. In this respect, reading is a more readily accessible activity for many women than television viewing, which depends upon the scheduling of television programmes at particular times.

Access to books was widespread; access to feminist books, however, was channelled through particular retail outlets. Only 18% of paperback books were bought in bookshops; the rest were bought from newsagents, chain stores and branches of the ubiquitous W.H. Smith and John Menzies, in high streets, stations and airports. While these stocked some non-fiction paper-backs - particularly those published by Penguin - the vast proportion of their stock was, as now, fiction. The uneven distribution of
non-fiction affected the frequency with which feminist messages were received by different social groups. Community bookshops flourished on housing estates and alternative bookshops in urban centres, but there is little evidence of feminist books reaching popular suburban and urban retail outlets until the final years of the decade. Women in rural areas relied largely on libraries for access to feminist books, and upon reviews in the national press for information about them. This could contribute to the concentration of movement organisations in 'metropolitan' areas.

While the function of books in extending the constituency for feminism in the context of a healthy book market and cultural formations including habitual reading is clear, the role of the press and television in contributing to the construction of public meanings of feminism and the constituency for feminist organizations is a more complex issue.

The function of television in the social engineering of the imagination has been heavily documented. The effects of television upon social movements have been argued in two main ways. Firstly, the function of television images of the Vietnam War in the mobilisation of protest movements against the war, and the links between these movements and the Student Movement in particular have been widely acknowledged. Secondly, the 'empire of image-producers' operating primarily through television has been widely identified as a primary enemy

In the case of the women's liberation movement, television was not cited by any one at the Centre as relevant to their decision to join the movement. Nevertheless, it became clear that television viewing had some direct effects in registering the existence of women's liberation, initially through the disruption of the televised 'Miss World' contest in 1969, which almost all the Centre users had heard of, if not seen themselves, and in which one (a member of the core Collective) had participated.

There were also less obvious effects. While there is no direct correspondence between the sales figures for a particular feminist title and the influence of that book within the movement, there is a clear co-relation between the ways in which a feminist book is promoted through the mass media, its sales figures and public perceptions of feminism and the movement, and hence the structure of the feminist constituency.

The cross-media referencing of particular titles through reviews and interviews in the national daily press, television, and in the case of feminist titles in particular, in women's magazines, functions to structure demand for those titles, and to locate it in particular ways in cultural hierarchies of taste (Winship, 1987; Warpole, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984).

As noted in 3.4 the construction by the mass media of
individual women as representative of women’s liberation, together with the organization and structure of the movement which had no mechanisms to hold that individual accountable as a representative, resulted in both Britain and the United States in metonymic representations of the movement. At any moment in time, the public meanings of feminism were articulated primarily around mass media representations of one woman, frequently the author of a recent publication.

This signifying function was assigned in the early years of the British movement to Germaine Greer, whose book The Female Eunuch was produced in the style of American pocket books, with a title and cover-design to appeal to the ‘popular’ market, and was widely recognised in mainstream and alternative publications. As also noted, this book was frequently cited by Centre users at Riley House as the book which played a key part in motivating them to attend a consciousness-raising group or other feminist event.

The processes of book promotion and the production of entertainment value in the electronic mass media and the press interacted to intervene in the construction of public meanings of feminism and women’s liberation, and to provide another source of information about feminist texts.

1 An attempt was made to avoid a comparable situation in France by one group of women who filed a copyright for Le Mouvement pour la Libération des Femmes (MLF). This monopolistic tactic however, contributed to the fragmentation of the French movement (Duchen, 1987).
The increasing appropriation of aspects of feminism by the mass media, together with the organizational features of the women’s liberation movement discussed in 3.5 produced a situation in which definitions of feminism became increasingly contested. By the mid nineteen seventies, Delmar’s ‘crisis of feminism’ (Delmar, 1986) was identified, a crisis in which the diffusion of feminism resulted in the dilution of the political context of the women’s liberation movement. Almost any cultural form or practice produced by women or taking women as its subject matter gained popular attributions of feminism. As Delmar commented,

‘All forms of political organizing or cultural production by women now tends to be called feminism. Its current easy usage makes me uneasy, even if only because I suspect that if a term can mean anything it also means nothing’ (Delmar, 1986, p. 21).

It was at this point in its development that the use of the term ‘women’s liberation’ became confined to a small number of participants; ‘the Women’s Movement’ became generally adopted as the title of the movement. ‘Liberation’ disappeared. The political objectives of the earlier manifestation of the movement was subsumed by the shared gender of its participants. This is the context in which some women claimed the title of ‘radical feminist’, to signal their continuing espousal of ‘women’s liberation, noted in Chapter 3.

The diffusion of feminism through the publication and market distribution of feminist books, and the
corresponding publicity orchestrated around some feminist titles, functioned to raise questions regarding the position of those individuals and institutions authorised to define particular cultural productions as 'feminist'. In some ways, the attribution of a feminist rubric functioned as an imprimateur for those with whom prominent feminist activists agreed, and their prominence was related to both publication and television coverage. It is worth re-iterating here, however, that the achievement by authors of the authority and legitimacy conferred by publication, did not over-rule the status achieved by women who participated in the communication networks of the New Left and the Underground. Access to the more restricted communications network of the formative years conferred prestige on the woman concerned.

5.2. Print language, speech communities and markers of feminism at the Women's Centre.

The participation of women such as Marianne in the formation of the first women's liberation groups and their routes to women's liberation through the New Left and radical political organizations played a significant part in structuring the informal power relations at Riley House. Familiarity with the individuals active in the formation of the earliest women's liberation groups and with the papers and pamphlets produced and exchanged in the formative years conferred a higher status than a
knowledge of the contents of these texts through published re-printings, as noted in Chapter 2. The question of the authority of the printed word and the authenticity of oral communications is returned to later in this section.

It is worth returning first to the role of publications and other printed texts in providing a means of mutual recognition between women as feminists at the Centre.

This provision of a means of mutual recognition does not involve the mobilisation of a single, unitary community of interpretation. The standardization of key features of a feminist discourse in itself permits the development of diverse and particular forms of feminist discourse; uniformity and diversity, as represented by the typical and the unique, are in this sense two sides of the same coin. In Anderson’s phrase, access to print commodities through the market provided the basis for a 'unified field of exchange' (Anderson, 1983, p. 21) not standard units of exchange. The functions of print commodities at issue here are those of the dissemination of feminist representations and arguments, the establishment of links between the various manifestations of feminism and the mobilisation of a distinctive feminist community.

As noted in chapter 2, knowledge of approved feminist uses of language was required as a criterion of inclusion in the community of feminism at Riley House.

Many women first encountered terms with contemporary feminist significations such as 'patriarchy' 'sexism' and
'the sexual division of labour' in feminist publications rather than in conversation or public rhetoric; for them, the use of these terms signified at the most general level feminism itself.

The relations between print language and speech forms is, however, complex. In the case of the women's movement, the relations between them are complicated by the competing forms of authority and truth at stake in orality and text. On the one hand as argued in 5.1, the authenticity of orality is related to the authority of experience, existential authority. On the other hand, the fact of publication and its legitimising function is associated with the authority of print - authorial authority. Access to print provided not only self-respect for the authors, as noted above, but authority for their views at a general level, whether or not their readers and interlocutors agreed with those views.

Nevertheless, the authenticity assigned to oral, interpersonal communications in the process of consciousness-raising and in practices such as feminist oral history and interviews with women which were perceived as more direct routes to experience, was maintained in the Women's Centre and other feminist venues.

Familiarity with acronyms provide a key example. While many women first encountered specific acronyms in print - in this case either in publications or in posters, billboards or pamphlets - familiarity with established
pronunciations can be acquired only through speech. The acronym WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) was recognised by all Centre users, but recent arrivals at the Centre could be distinguished by their pronunciation, which did not necessarily conform to that employed by the campaign group and adopted by more established Centre users.

Received pronunciation and standardized usage of language functioned as oral markers of feminism to confer authority through their indication of participation in feminist activities and knowledge of the feminist terrain. Knowledge of particular uses of print which did not emerge directly through a particular pronunciation in speech also functioned to indicate a textual knowledge of the feminist terrain in a different way.

In some texts, usually deemed radical feminist, 'Women' is spelt 'Wimmin' or 'Womyn' to differentiate the noun from the gender marked connotations of the second syllable. In a discussion of a radical feminist publication, one speaker who was discussing various categories of 'women' was interrupted and asked in a joking manner 'How do you spell that?' She joined in the general laughter which followed this question. The joke could not be shared by anyone who was not familiar with this textual practice. Familiarity with the third term of the joke, its referent, was shared by the speaker and the listeners, but was derived not from speech but from the printed text.
It is clear that a wide range of books and articles served to provide women with feminist credentials; the question of which particular books and articles were read by different women at the Centre and what the choice of reading matter indicates is more complex.

Several photo-copied articles appeared at Riley House, usually on the chest in the entrance hall. Ann Koedt's celebrated paper 'The myth of the vaginal orgasm' was there when I arrived at the Centre. Most Centre users had heard of it, but not all had read it. When asked what she thought of it, Viv, a member of the Women's Therapy group, replied: 'Well, I haven't read it, but I knew what she means!' (laughter). The title itself (and possibly earlier conversations with other women) had served to produce a meaning for Viv with which she apparently agreed.

Two other photocopies remained on the chest throughout the period of fieldwork; Pat Mainardi's paper 'The politics of Housework' and 'The tyranny of structurelessness', (undated, 'Joleen'). Neither were removed from the Centre; the former was referred to in conversation by the consciousness-raising group, although it was not clear whether they had read the Centre copy, or had come across it elsewhere. The latter paper is a critique of the organisational structure of the women's movement, from an American perspective. It was not discussed at the Centre, although it was directly relevant to the chaotic proceedings of the plenary sessions at the

Occasionally a 'client' could be observed flipping through the photo-copies as she waited to be noticed and invited in and lingered in the entrance hall - the intermediate zone between the interior of the Centre and the world outside, discussed in 6.4. She would drop them as soon as she was greeted by a Centre user, however.

There is no evidence that all Centre users read the same material, even though the three articles mentioned were all available to them. The women at the Centre were vague about who provided the photocopies. Belinda, a member of the core Collective replied when asked this 'I can't remember who brought those. Anyone can bring in whatever they like, you know'.

The only publication regularly referred to by all the Centre users (and former Centre users) was *Spare Rib*, although different women initiated discussion on different articles. The anniversary issue 'Ten Years On' which appeared in 1978 was discussed thoroughly before a Collective meeting. Copies of *Spare Rib* were also lent and borrowed by many of the women. The status of the magazine as a national voice for feminists was clear at Riley House, even though during this period the editorial Collective was engaged in a furious debate regarding the position of black women in the movement and the magazine (Winship, 1987).

In the Women's Therapy group and the socialist feminist discussion group there was more evidence that group
members read some of the same texts apart from Spare Rib; indeed, the discussion group also functioned as a reading group. For both groups, the family comprised the bedrock of feminist debate; the books and articles dealing with issues related to the family varied considerably according to the group. The Women’s Therapy group members cited two books which had recently been published in Britain as exciting and relevant to their concerns, Nancy Friday’s *My Mother, My Self* (Friday, 1977) and Dorothy Dinnerstein’s *The rocking of the cradle and the ruling of the world*. Both these were by American authors, and both dealt with women’s relations with their mothers and their children. As discussed in detail in Chapter 6, some of the women in this group were mothers and all discussed their relationships with their families in conversation both inside and outside the Centre.

The consciousness-raising group members, all of whom were mothers, also discussed family relationships. They also happily admitted to reading fiction (which they referred to as ‘feminist fiction’) and actively relating to the narratives and characters in novels and short stories. Two novels which they had all read and talked about were Marylin French’s *The Women’s Room* and Fay Weldon’s *Remember Me*. Popular fiction was taken seriously by these women, and referred to quite frequently – usually with laughter and nodding of the head to indicate a rather rueful identification with the characters and stories.

The socialist feminist group on the family however,
decided on more theoretical texts, and texts with clear marxist links for their discussions on the family; Wilhelm Reich was the first author the women agreed to read and discuss. The first book which was read and reported on was *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. *The Sexual Revolution* was discussed the following week. What was significant in this choice was the preference for a writer with a marxist pedigree rather than an explicitly feminist text; (what was particularly interesting for me was that Reich’s early work drew upon the anthropologies of Engels, Morgan and Malinowski). The project of this group (although not made explicit) was to re-read primary sources with a view to identify arguments pertaining to sexuality, morality and the family and integrating them into a feminist perspective; this relates closely to the on-going process of providing new feminist readings of Engels and Marx which characterised much theoretical socialist feminist practice (Hartman, 1979; Sayers et al, 1988).

The roots of socialist feminism in the political and cultural configurations of the New Left and their uneasy but continuing links with the Old Left were clear in the unstated assumption that reading and discussion should focus on marxist sources. Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was proposed as another text by Clare, the residential worker at the Women’s Refuge, in view of the critique of Reich’s work which it included, but this was read only by Clare (and myself) and little interest was shown in discussing it.
There was a continuum of the 'personal' and the 'political' evident in the texts selected in different groups along which Centre users may be differently positioned in terms of their own interpretation of the principle 'The personal is political'. The consciousness-raising group enjoyed fiction, and related to it in terms of anecdotes about their personal histories, although Ingrid and Lena in particular also read more overtly political books and attended feminist seminars. They almost invariably read books by women and referred to them as 'feminist' if they identified with them and approved of them. Personal identification was a central part of the pleasures of feminist reading.

The women's Therapy group also read books by women, although Viv (who later became a counsellor) also read books by men, usually psychologists or psychoanalysts. These books were by women who wrote explicitly as feminists, dealing with personal relationships and self images, although these topics are presented in a political context in the books concerned. Books which were approved of were described as 'helpful'. The women in this group pursued a sexual politics with a strong personal dimension.

The socialist feminist group subjected marxist writings to feminist scrutiny, and were less interested in books by established feminists in the group context, although references and allusions made in passing suggested that they were all 'well read' in this area and familiar with
feminist theoretical developments as well as political initiatives. They were engaged in re-working the connections between marxism and feminism at the political level, with no explicit connection to the personal.

The differences in the selection of texts and the focus of the different groups, relates to the different modes of oral communication employed - at least in the group context - by the groups. Consciousness-group members used anecdotes from their own lives, and particularly from areas of their lives shared with other group members, their experiences of marriage and motherhood. 'Experience-based' knowledge was shared in this group.

The women in the Therapy group moved frequently from the first person to the third person forms of speech in their discussions, as they moved from the particularity of personal experiences to general propositions. In conversation outside the Centre their stories focussed more on their families of origin than on their relationship to their children and contained a good deal of reflection on 'what it was like for them'. The experience of other women was a subject of speculation.

The stories of Centre users, and their content, were examined in Chapter 4. What is interesting here is the relation between their choice of reading made by different groups in the context of the Centre, (or, in the case of the consciousness-raising group as feminists who had left the Centre), and the forms of speech they employed. There is a clear correspondance between the focus, treatment,
and textual strategies of the books which they read and their modes of interpersonal communication.

The speech forms in use in discussions in the socialist feminist group were notable for their exclusive reliance on the third person. The development of political theory and analysis were the objective of the discussions. This was underlined by an exchange which occurred early in the period of fieldwork. I asked if anyone else in the group had children. Heads were shaken in silence, to indicate a negative response. Clare then intervened with a comment to the effect that we had all undergone some form of parenting, though. Marianne replied 'this is not a consciousness-raising group'. The reply comprised a reprimand. The group returned to the discussion of how to approach the question of the family theoretically.

In the context of these discrepancies in how the personal/political dimensions of feminism were activated at the Centre in the choice of reading and the use of particular forms of speech, the question arises of how or whether, books and articles contributed to the Centre identity.

It is clear that Spare Rib, with its central role in mobilising and maintaining the imagined community of feminism among geographically dispersed and socially disparate women at a national level, had a similar function at Riley House. As noted above, it was the one publication which everyone at the Centre read and discussed. This alone produced some form of consensus,
or shared interpretation, among the Centre users, regardless of what group they participated in regularly. The magazine provided a link between the Centre users, just as it - to some extent - provided a link between all those of us readers who identified themselves as feminists. At the Centre, the unstructured conversations at meal times and before and after meetings i.e. on occasions when women from different groups were present, it provided shared reading matter on the basis of which some shared positions could be - and often were - negotiated. The function of widely available feminist print commodities in mobilising an imagined community which I have argued was exemplified at Riley House by Spare Rib's function in contributing to the maintainance of the Centre community.

In summary, feminist books and articles and their market distribution functioned at several levels in the formation of the imagined community of feminism, in group formation and in the informal power structures within the Centre and the movement, although at each level oral communications played a part. Five points have been argued: Firstly, 'print commodities' played a central role in the extension of feminism from the original women's liberation groups to a heterogenous collection of geographically dispersed women. Secondly, they contributed to the mobilisation of an image of community through contributing to the construction of a community of
dispersal, and functioned in ways analogous to a social network, constituting a (mediated) feminist network of communication. Thirdly, their appropriation and representation through the mass media, and the transformative work carried out by the different media contributed both to the wider diffusion of feminism in popular culture and the 'crisis' of the mid nineteen seventies. Fourthly, they provided the means by which a feminist vernacular became standardized, common to a wide range of feminist discourses, and interacted with oral communications to provide markers of feminism and to indicate degrees of 'local knowledge'. In the instance given above, a way of pronouncing a particular word (or acronym) could serve to distinguish an established 'insider' from a newcomer.

Finally, the legitimating functions of publication for 'women's voice' (and more specifically for feminist theoretical discourses) worked to confer authority on feminists whose work was published, but this source of authority existed in a relationship of tension with the existential authority associated with orality, participation, and action throughout the movement and at Riley House in particular.

At the women's Centre, as noted in 2.4 personal and participatory knowledge were privileged. Oral style could also provide Centre users with a motive for denying access to another group, or constructing them as 'Other' rather than merely different. This occurred in the case of the
Wages for Housework Collective, and is discussed in detail in Chapter 7. It is worth noting here however that their tendency to shout and interrupt at a Collective meeting and thereby trangressed the groundrules of the Centre which were deemed by Centre users to be valid for all feminists. Thus, a particular mode of oral communication could result in a particular group being excluded from the Centre and constructed as Other.

While print worked on public perceptions of the movement and provided the means for acceptance as a feminist at the Centre as at other feminist groups, oral communications played a greater part in the negotiations of Centre identity.
6. SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AT THE WOMEN'S CENTRE.

This chapter moves away from the modes and forms of communication at the Centre to focus on its spatial organization. It is argued that the organization of space at Riley Houses functions to demarcate 'insiders' from 'outsiders' and to codify and regulate a series of differences - between women and men; non feminist women and feminists; feminist individuals, groups and practices excluded from the Centre and those deemed acceptable, and finally 'insider' and 'outsider' feminists.

The first part of the chapter, however, considers the wider contexts in which the Centre is located.

Firstly, as noted in the Introduction, Women’s Centres have been classified as 'local manifestations of the women’s movement'; the question of exactly how the Centre at Riley House relates to its locality needs to be addressed.

Secondly, it is argued in Chapters 1 and 2 that the reclamation of the Riley House site by the Council constituted a significant element in the mobilisation of a bounded feminist community of identification at the Centre. The relations between the Centre, and local government which provided the context for both the negotiations between Centre users and the local Council and the re-negotiation of the Centre identity have to be considered. The political location of the Centre then,
has to be established.

Beyond the immediate physical, social and political location of the Centre however, the wider context of the symbolic mapping of the social and the interaction of symbolic or ideological maps and concrete social organization has to be theorised in relation to gender. The uses and meanings of space by women need to be addressed in order to make sense of the social and symbolic dimensions of spatial organization as they affect women and are interpreted by women. It is in this broader context that feminist spatial strategies in play at the Centre as well as the Centre users' routinized patterns of behaviour in relation to the organization of space can be accounted for.

In 6.1 it is argued that the analysis of spatial organization in any concrete situational context involves the comprehension of extra-contextual dimensions whose content and meaning inform the context of situation. While particular meanings of space are invoked through practice and are context-dependent, they are also structured by broader practices and discourses. It is argued that the mapping of the public and private spheres, their organization in terms of gender and the implications of the public-private distinction for gender relations at a general level of social, cultural and political organisations are of central significance not only for the analysis of space but of feminist spatial practices in particular.
The public/private distinction and its implications for gender relations are examined in relation to the slogan 'the personal is political' and feminist challenges to this distinction are considered through the Reclaim the Night Campaign in which several Centre users participated.

In 6.2 the physical location of the Centre is described, and the status of locality as a source of identity for Centre users is examined. The social composition of the Women's Centre is briefly reviewed in terms of marital status, motherhood and occupation, initially noted in chapter 4, and these factors are related to the degree to which Centre users are involved in the environs of the Women's Centre and the meanings which the locality holds for them.

The following section, 6.3, considers the relations between Centre users and the local community, defined not in terms of territory, residence patterns or neighbourhood, but in relation to the organization of social reproduction, and in particular its gender organization. In line with Cockburn's model of the local community as the site of community action, these sites are specified as i) the points of 'collective reproduction' at which individuals present themselves as 'clients' of state services, ii) the point of 'employment in reproduction' where the individuals concerned constitute the workforce of the local state, and iii) the point of 'privatized reproduction', i.e. family life (Cockburn, 1977).

The relations between the Centre and the local
community are pursued in relation to this model of the local community, and the relations of community politics and the women’s movement are reviewed as part of the political context for feminist projects.

In the final section, 6.4, the spatial organization of the Centre is analysed in relation to its structuring of a hierarchy of difference and opposition at the Centre; in other words, it is argued that aspects of the social organization of the Centre which were taken as ‘going without saying’ emerge from an analysis of spatial organization. It is also argued that the Centre functions as an alternative site for the organization of social reproduction in a form different from those available elsewhere in the local community. Finally, the Centre is located conceptually, or symbolically, in terms of the public and private spheres.

6.1 The analysis of space and the gender organization of the public and the private

The analysis of spatial organization has been focused over the last two decades upon the inter relations between physical geography, the concrete organization of social life and symbolic space (Geerz, 1971; Bourdieu, 1973, 1977; Ardener, 1981; Moore, 1984; Jackson, 1988; Pollock, 1988). This form of analysis privileges the study of symbolic maps of the world, rather than descriptions of actual social spaces; in so doing, it provides a generally
useful model for the analysis of the meanings assigned to spatial organization both at Riley House and in society at large by Centre users and for its location in relation to the public and private spheres.

At the most inclusive level of the symbolic mapping of the social world, the distinction between the public and the private spheres functions as a central guide to orientation in the world. Accordingly, debates around the boundaries of the public and private, the formal and informal, and the political and domestic spheres and their gender organization have been central to both anthropological studies of the position of women and to specific feminist practices, including those adopted by Centre users.

The mapping of the public and private at a particular social and historical conjuncture and their implications for gender relations constitute an essential context for the analysis of spatial organization at the Women's Centre and the feminist perceptions and activities with which it was closely interwoven. While the meanings of the world are invoked through concrete practice, and are context-dependent, the meanings invoked in a particular situational context are closely related to - or in Moore's term, 'resonate with' - meanings from other contexts (Moore, 1984, p. 183).

The symbolic dimension of space in any given context therefore both refers to and derives from wider contexts of practice and discourse. In the case of the meaning of
spatial organization for women, the broadest context of the public and private needs to be examined in relation to the organization of gender relations.

While the content, meaning and range of the public and private spheres vary historically and cross-culturally, they turn in all cases on questions of moral agency - the evaluation of human and social capacities - and on questions of political organization - assessments of the aims and purposes of alternative modes of social organization.

The public and private, then, can be viewed as two of a cluster of basic notions which structure all forms of social life. As such, they comprise an intersubjectively shared realm, where intersubjectivity refers, in Jean Elshtain's terms, 'to ideas, symbols and concepts that are not only shared, but whose sharing re-verberates within and helps to constitute a way of life, on both manifest and latent levels' (Elshtain, 1981, p. 5).

The particular meaning to individual social actors of an intersubjectively shared symbol or concept may vary, but a range of shared meanings has to be present in order for it to participate in an intersubjective realm, a shared universe of meaning and action. This is the case because it is not, and cannot be addressed as, an isolated concept or symbolic form; rather, it functions in relation to a range of other activities, beliefs and social relations.

On this basis, the public sphere constitutes the proper
realm of politics and market in the British context, while the private sphere is associated with family, household and interpersonal relations. Further, the public sphere is seen as primarily the domain of men, and the private sphere is associated primarily with women. The corollary of this gendered set of distinctions is that women are symbolically located in the non-political, non-commercial private sphere and primarily identified with it.

Evaluations of women's capacities, and beliefs and propositions regarding gender relations are therefore ordered by terms which derive from, and interact with the public-private distinction. Women are predominantly excluded from or marginalised and undervalued in the public sphere. They are rhetorically valorized in the private sphere by gender specific references to human nature. Further, women tend to be individuated within separate units as 'housewives' and 'mothers' as opposed to being perceived as part of the collectivities of the public sphere (Elshtain, 1981; Davidoff and Hall, 1983; Garmarnikov, 1983; Mackenzie, 1988).

The assignation of low value to women in the public sphere occurs because the basic notions of the public sphere are tied to notions of citizenship and authority, as well as to the state and law and to other concepts such as freedom and civic virtue (Wolin, 1977). Those who are marginalized within the public sphere therefore stand in an indirect relation to the key values of liberal democracy and represent, in this cluster of basic notions,
the 'second sex'.

The distinction between the public and the private spheres and their content, range and meaning are not however static, as noted above. The increasing discussions of the 'new' social movements, including the women's movement, often turn on the changing parameters of these domains. The increasing 'penetration' of the private sphere by the welfare state, together with the development of information technology and corresponding 'surveillance state' in the period following the Second World War are widely viewed as both distinctive features of the post-industrial state and as triggers for the 'new' social movements (Touraine, 1981; Hirsch, 1978; Melucci, 1980; Castells, 1983).

The point at issue here is whether the re-structuring of the public and private spheres is an indication of 'statism' or of a phase of 'neo-individualism', and whether either or both of these interpretations signify positive or negative assessments of the alternative modes of social organization and symbolic mapping which this re-structuring presages.

In Hirsch's formulation, the social movements of the sixties and seventies emerged in reaction to 'the Security State', where the welfare functions are fused with a technically refined 'surveillance state'. The Security State has penetrated into spheres of life previously considered 'private' through a shift from social (legislative) regulation to private regulation'
From a feminist perspective however, the 'penetration' of the private sphere has been viewed as an 'opening up' of the private domain, an index of a broader re-structuring of the public and the private which could be mobilised in the re-negotiation of the categories and symbols of spatial, temporal and cultural categories pursued in relation to the slogan 'the personal is political'. As Davidoff and Hall put it, 'The shifting ambit of the public and the private was as much the territory of the mind as physical space' (Davidoff and Hall, 1987, p. 320). The implicitly threatening 'penetration' of the private sphere by the public sphere can be read as a positive potential for the re-structuring of the public and private and of gender relations.

Balbo argues, in an analysis of the shifting relations of the family, women and the state from the nineteen fifties onwards, that the welfare state rested upon a concept of the private subject as public citizen and in some ways functioned to re-affirm the public sphere, while opening up channels between the public and the private (Balbo, 1987, p. 218). In her scenario, the pluralisation of the servicing agencies of the welfare state, together with changes in the public agenda which came to address private needs rather than just seeking to fulfil rights and entitlements, contributed to the fragmentation of the state.

Public welfare became a challenge for the state
apparatus, since the assertion of the public domain proceeds precisely by its ministration to a minimum of private welfare. In the meantime, throughout the seventies, the Welfare State still postulated the traditional public-private dualism in which the state is central to the public domain. In fact, universal entitlements protected private needs, defined in the context of the paradigmatic nuclear family of Welfare State familial ideology and ministered to by women, but also functioned to re-affirm the public sphere and to link the notions of 'rights' to the domain of the private subject.

During the same period, there is evidence of an expansion of concerns formerly relegated to 'private' life into the public domain, which have also been seen as underpinning the emergence of the women's movement. The promotion of consumerism through the 'libidinization of consumption' (Hall, 1980) also served to bring aspects of female sexuality, hitherto largely confined in principle to the private domain, into the public sphere through advertising and publicity campaigns (Berger, 1971; Betterton, 1985; Pollock, 1988). The resistance of the libertarian movements and counter-cultures to consumerism is noted by Wilson in her discussion of feminist appropriations of libertarianism. In her view this rebellion against 'property and propriety' neatly linked property relations and personal decorum, the public and the private, and thus functioned to affirm the blurring of
the boundaries between the public and the private in similar ways to the 'libidinization of consumerism' but to different effect (Wilson, 1986).

To summarize the preceding section, it is argued that the analysis of spatial organization has to be situated within the symbolic mapping of the social world by the shared intersubjective concepts, ideas and symbols of the public and private, including their moral and political dimensions and their implications for the organization of gender relations. The concepts and beliefs around the public-private divide were, in the period of fieldwork, in flux, with the content and range of the public and private spheres changing and contested.

It is in the context of the mapping of the public and private and their gender organization that the feminist campaigns, organized around 'the personal is political' have to be viewed. The campaigns for Legal and Financial Independence, for Wages for Housework, for Abortion on Demand, and for Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities were manifestations of a struggle not just to incorporate women as citizens into the public sphere on terms equal to those of men, but to challenge the boundaries of the public and private and values assigned to them. Thus the 'opening up' of women's homes to consciousness-raising group meetings discussed in chapter 4 facilitated the extension of the 'political' - understood as areas of life amenable to principled and rational action - 'inward' into the home, from the apparently inaccessible politics of the
state. Similarly, the economy - understood here as activities involving wage labour, the exchange of goods and material power relations - was extended into the sphere of interpersonal relations and the family through the domestic labour debate conducted primarily in the New Left Review and feminist campaigns for financial independence.

As Charlotte Brunch declared in the late nineteen sixties:

'There is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal. The old barriers have fallen'. (Brunch, undated).

This declaration held only for a relatively small number of women, however. During the period of fieldwork, Centre users and other feminist groups and organizations continued to challenge the public-private divide. The articulation of these challenges to the contestation of physical and social space were complex.

At one level, the spaces of femininity can be defined in the broadest sense as those spaces from which femininity is lived in social practice and discourse, the products of a lived sense of both physical and social locatedness. Pollock has argued that the regulation of women's activities and of femininity as an ideological construct is achieved in the public sphere 'in the social relations of seeing and being seen' (Pollock, 1988, p. 67).

The use of public spaces, in this sense, is regulated for women by the social organization of 'the look'; the
constitution of women as the sexual object of the gaze of men functions to police women’s use of public space.

In other words, the public spaces are actively coded by the practices of everyday life according to gender and women’s access to entire areas is restricted and regulated, particularly in relation to time and the presence or absence of an accompanying male. The gendered aspects of the public and private are inscribed in the locality. These restrictions and regulations were challenged by feminists, including the Centre users.

In the context of the gender regulation of public space, the argument that the colonization of territory is a central feature of urban social movements and constitute a key strategy of sub-cultural resistance is problematic. In his analysis of the gay community in San Francisco, Castells cites Wolf’s comments on lesbians’ relations to ‘territory’ as evidence of an alternative tactic of political culture apparently without taking account of the regulation of women’s use of space: ‘Lesbians tend not to concentrate in a given territory but to establish social and interpersonal networks’ (Wolf, 1979, p. 72 cited in Castells, 1983, fn. p. 139).

This narrow approach to women’s relations with territory is characteristic of most explorations of the re-negotiation of space as a strategy of resistance in sociology and cultural geography. The objective of feminist attempts at the re-clamation of space is not linked to one particular ‘patch’ or ‘turf’ - although
particular demonstrations may focus on one locality - but rather to achieve access to and use of a whole range of physical and social spaces on the same terms as men, without being constructed as sexual objects of the male gaze.

Centre users participated in a number of demonstrations organised by the Reclaim the Night campaign in which large numbers of women took to the streets of 'red-light' districts with a high profile sex industry, carrying flares and torches and shouting at men in the area. The demonstrations attended by Centre users targeted Soho - a locality notorious for strip clubs and sex shops as well as prostitution - and Kings Cross, an area with a high rate of prostitution, because when a woman frequented these areas at night unaccompanied by a man it was assumed that she was a prostitute soliciting business.

Three points are worth making in relation to this campaign; firstly the salience of temporal structuring of women's use of public space, secondly the inter-relation between the legislative regulation of sexuality and the informal regulation of women's use of space in everyday life and thirdly the distinction between strategy and behaviour patterns in general.

The first point is clear from the name of the campaign itself, which privileges time over space. Feminists were claiming the right to use public space at night without the permanent threat of sexual harassment. The social organisation of sexuality and its time schedules were at
issue here. The regulation of women's use of space is structured by a temporal dimension.

The second point needs explication of the Wolfenden Report, and the subsequent legislation around prostitution in the nineteen sixties which has been generally viewed as liberal or 'permissive'. The Sexual Offences Act ruled that prostitution in itself was not a criminal offence, but constituted a private contract. On the other hand it ruled that soliciting was an offence, and increased the penalties. While apparently constituting an example of the shift from public to private regulation of sexual relations noted by Hall and Edgar (Hall, 1980; Edgar, 1986) as part of the neo-individualist phase of the late nineteen fifties and sixties, in fact it functioned to further restrict women's use of public space and thus intensify the regulation of female sexuality in the public domain (Greenwood and Young, 1980). This function arose from the fact that since prostitutes were wary of soliciting, for fear of arrest, any unaccompanied woman on the streets could be taken for a prostitute and propositioned by men - and frequently was (and is). This outcome of legislation which was deemed permissive illustrates the close - albeit paradoxical, in this case - inter-relation of legislation in the public sphere and the restrictions on individual women as subjects, which the campaigning women struggled to articulate.

The third point regarding the distinction between strategy and general behaviour patterns is relevant to the
analysis throughout the thesis, but is particularly pertinent with regard to the tendency to conflate different interpretations and uses of physical and social space with strategies of resistance (Bourdieu, 1977; Moore, 1984).

A strategy is technically defined as the art of the disposal of forces, or an instance of this or a plan formed according to this art. It implies intention and conscious deliberation, and needs to be sharply demarcated from an idiom or pattern or style which is routinely and unreflectively employed. It also implies choice and selection. The classification of particular uses of space and time (let alone the acceptance of a particular duty or waged work) as strategic is not a useful one if the behaviour is part of an unreflective pattern of use, (or is seen as a social or economic necessity with no perceived alternatives).

In the context of the use of space by Centre users, the following example underlines the relevance of this distinction. After the socialist-feminist meetings at the Centre, the group members, sometimes together with other Centre users, frequently went to nearby pub to continue discussion and engage in general conversation. This was a regular pattern of social interaction. Although at the time large groups of women were not generally welcome in pubs, (except in Ladies Bars), there was no particular resistance from the manager or bar-staff in this particular pub.
On three occasions however, the group deliberately went to a different pub which had a reputation for refusing access to groups of women. This was a strategic move. The women anticipated the refusal to serve them which ensued, and used the opportunity to argue with the bar-staff and canvass support from the customers. The third time they were served, and promptly returned the following week to the usual pub at which they had a particular group of tables where they liked to sit and which was nearer to Riley House.

Although it was not a widespread practice for groups of women to drink in pubs in the evening, the general habit of the Centre users to go for a drink together constituted a regular, routinized social practice in which the women caught up on gossip, and often arranged future meetings. The visits to a particular pub with a poor reputation (for the Centre users) constituted a strategic intervention.

The routinized and strategic uses of space at the Women’s Centre are pursued in 6.4. The point to be stressed here is that the uses of social and physical space made by women in general, and by Centre users and other feminists in particular cannot be assumed to be always strategic. The gender organization of space frequently limits the options available to women regarding their use of space, and cannot be assumed to be the outcome of deliberate intention. Further, while Centre users organised explicitly to extend women’s choice
regarding the use of particular social and physical spaces and to challenge the boundaries of the public and the private, they sometimes also used space to socialise in an unreflective, non-strategic way.

The next section considers the physical location of the Centre, and examines the ways in which Centre users related to their particular locality.

6.2 Locality and identity

Any analysis of the relations of the Women's Centre to its physical location and local community has to begin with a consideration of the significance of geographical location, the social relations of locality, and localism. Classified as one of the 'local manifestations' of the women's movement by feminist commentators, and provided by the local Council with a site for the purposes of supplying local women with advice, information and a women-only social space, the issue of locality is clearly important.

At another level, too, the question of locality is relevant to the career of the women's movement itself; as Castells notes, questions of 'community, locality and identity' (Castells, 1983) are frequently taken to be central to social movements, at least urban social movements. As noted in 6.1, social movements are frequently theorized as triggered by increasing state intervention in the private sphere. This is generally
viewed as corresponding to, or causing, the demise of local community.

From a liberal perspective, 'local community' involves a degree of local autonomy, which in turn constitutes a condition of social integration (Halsey, 1978). This perspective also rests upon a notion of localism, where locality comprises a basis of identification; as a source of social identity and of social order, the local community provides the means for knowing one's place - in the social as well as the geographical sense of the term.

As Wallman argues, however, the use of the term to refer to a geographical locus of kinship, ethnic or other associative ties, or to length of residence in a demarcated area, or some combination of these, may serve as a useful indicator of involvement or investment in a local area but it does not necessarily follow that locality is a significant source of social identity. 'Localism as an identity option is not the same as being there .... It's significance varies' (Wallman, 1986, p. 64).

This point is useful to bear in mind in the case of the Women’s Centre and Centre users. In the following section the location of the Centre in a particular locality and its significance to the Centre users is examined in terms of the meanings of the locality for different Centre users, it’s physical distance from their homes and places of work, and the interaction of Centre users and the local physical landscape. Questions of locality are pursued
in 6.3 in the examination of the place of community politics in the mobilisation of the women’s movement and the local community as a conceptual locus of the Women’s Centre.

The Women’s Centre was situated in the North West of Camden, technically the ‘inner city’, a term which frequently functions in popular culture as a code for social pathology. The Centre’s geographical location however, was in a generally salubrious area of London, close to the site of the original Women’s Centre to which Riley House was the successor and bordered by Hampstead to the North West and a more stereotypical area of the inner city to the South East.

The location of the Women’s Centre was referred to in different terms by different Centre users. All Centre users referred to Riley House as ‘the Centre’ in discussions which unambiguously took Riley House as the referent. The definite article signified that this particular Centre did not need to be distinguished from any other. In some contexts it was specified in terms of locality, either as ‘the Hampstead Centre’ or as ‘The Belsize Park Centre’. The naming of the Centre in terms of its locality invariably arose in groups meeting outside the Centre when the conversation turned around either the trajectories by means of which individual women came to attend the Centre, or the state of the women’s movement at any particular moment, when other Centres were assessed, evaluated, and located in the feminist political
The different ways of naming the Centre are relevant in terms of both geography and history. They relate partly to the direction from which Centre users approached Riley House, partly to its location in terms of the parameters of the activities of their everyday lives, and partly to the length of involvement of the women concerned in the women's movement.

Women who approached the Centre from the south and the east tended to refer to it in terms of their destination, Hampstead, with its connotations of affluence and its association with the intelligentsia. Women who tended to call it the 'Belsize Park Centre' either approached it from the west with the Belsize Village area functioning as a western boundary to the locality with which they were familiar in everyday practices, or knew about the antecedents of the Riley House Centre in Belsize Park, either from direct participation or from indirect sources.

The homes and workplaces of Centre users who divulged this information - directly or indirectly - are shown in map (i).

The point which emerges from this survey of different nomenclatures is that notions of boundary and destination together with the historical feminist associations of 'Belsize Park' structured the ways in which Centre users situated Riley House in terms of cultural and physical geography.

Physical distance and ease of access to Riley House
Map (i) Distribution of dwellings and workplaces in relation to Riley House

Key:

D Dwelling

W Workplace
were cited as only a limiting factor by most Centre users - they chose to attend it not because it was the nearest or most easily accessible, but because of all those which were within a feasible distance. Riley House was the Centre which they preferred. The other Centres in the borough are indicated in map (ii).

Interestingly, women from outside London who attended conferences in the city referred to it as 'the Camden Centre', thereby indicating that it was better known to them than the other Centres in the borough, or at least better known to be in the borough of Camden. This could be due either to a knowledge of the on-going negotiations with the Council or to the achievement of a certain renown by the Centre or individual Centre users - or to a combination of both.

As discussed in 6.4 it was time rather than physical distance which comprised the key constraint for most of the women. The length of time which the journey to the Centre took was not, surprisingly, perceived as a primary factor in time constraints.

Social distance proved a more important factor than physical distance in the decision-making processes of Centre users regarding the Centre of their choice. The women regularly discussed their encounters with other feminists at various venues in terms of degrees of 'welcoming' or 'elitism' and 'exclusiveness', or (more rarely) they denigrated other feminist groupings as 'aggressive' or 'awful'. The Centre users' evaluations
Map (ii) Distribution of Women's Centres used by Riley House women.

KEY:

KH. Riley House
K. Kingsgate
HIW. Hole in the Wall
KX. Kings Cross
ER. Essex Road
T. Tufnell Park
of other Women's Centres are discussed in Chapter 7; the
general point to be made in this context is that
subjective feelings of the proximity or distance of
a particular venue relate to the extent to which a
particular set of social interactions are perceived as
inclusive and familiar or exclusive and alienating.

In the context of Riley House, this perception depended
to some extent upon whether a Centre user was acquainted
with other women who used the Centre. As discussed in
Chapters 2 and 4, the proximate cause of a woman’s
decision to join a group at Riley House was frequently an
invitation from a friend (although this decision was
invariably made in the wider context of some knowledge of
feminism from books, magazine or newspaper articles or
periodicals). Acquaintance or friendship with other
Centre users was not necessarily a sufficient reason for
continuing to use the Centre however, as the discussion of
the consciousness-raising group in chapter 4 indicates.

Nevertheless, a subjective sense of social and cultural
proximity, together with the closely related factor of the
extent to which other Centre users' versions of feminism
matched their own, was an important factor in the initial
decisions of individual Centre users to participate in the
Riley House Centre as opposed to any other.

The question of social proximity also relates to
another issue which the location of the Women's Centre,
together with three others, in a London borough raises;
that is, the issue of the extent to which the women's
movement was composed of the 'metropolitan intelligentsia' (Segal, 1983). Definitions of the category of the intelligentsia or the intellectuals are discussed in 3.1; the point at issue here is the extent to which the movement was a metropolitan phenomenon and the Centre was therefore 'typical' of this.

The documentary evidence indicates clearly that the first women's liberation groups emerged in London, together with groups of women on the same social networks in the provincial university towns of Bristol, Colchester, Leeds and Liverpool. The links with the student movement, albeit links frequently mediated by men, as demonstrated in 3.1, and links with the labour movement in Bristol in particular are clear (Rowbotham, 1972, 1989; Coote and Campbell, 1982).

Nevertheless, individual women who were widely dispersed throughout England - and to some extent Scotland, participated in the imagined community of feminism, as argued in Chapters 2 and 5, and often formed their own groups. By 1975, almost every issue of the movement magazine *Spare Rib* carried appeals by women in small towns and rural areas for other feminists to contact them and form a consciousness-raising group or a 'women's group'.

This 'horizontal' extension of the movement conformed to the aspirations of movement participants, who attempted

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1 Little data is available on the organisation and career of the women's movement in Scotland, although there is evidence of a strong socialist feminist network there. Even less data is available from Wales, although some Welsh women's groups advertised in *Spare Rib*.
to challenge the geographical zoning by which various forms of socio-economic power are installed, and to break down the privileging of specific places - particular residential districts, university campuses and so on - in favour of an exchange of individuals and ideas between different places. The decision to hold the National Conference in a different town each year and the dispersal of several groups from the London Women’s Liberation Workshop in central London to outer London areas are examples of this policy.

The movement was therefore widely diffused by the period of fieldwork, yet the movement was most securely and widely established in London where the social networks traversing the field of the women’s movement were long established, dense, and closely overlapping. Women’s Centres were more prolific in large urban areas than in small towns.

This feature of the women’s movement, the extent and density of feminist social networks in the metropolis and other cities, as opposed to the discursive dimension of feminism which was organized around the geographically dispersed consumption of print commodities, provides an important context for the consideration of Centre users’ relations with the location of Riley House and the mobilisation of a Centre community. It contributed to the fact that the existence of the Centre in a particular locality was a factor of only marginal importance to most Centre users.
Furthermore, the founding Collective had first requested a site 'in the centre of the borough', in the Kings Cross area, which they felt was a hub of activity with a working class constituency. It should be added, that it is also the site of the Council offices and the headquarters of the trade union NALGO, the National Association of Local Government Officers, to which several of the Centre users belonged as is discussed in 5.4 and Chapter 6. There was no evidence of any great degree of investment in the particular locality in which Riley House was situated, with the exception of one Centre user who was a residential worker at the Refuge for battered wives situated in the vicinity.

One reason for the relatively low investment in the locality of the Women's Centre was the fact that most of the Centre users had not lived in London for more than ten years; the relatively brief duration of their residence tended to militate against a high degree of involvement in the locality. Several women were not English; one was Dutch, one Welsh and two came from the United States. Several more had moved to London from other parts of England.

In addition to geographical mobility and a widespread lack of roots in the city, several of the Centre users had moved to London with their husbands or boyfriends, at the men's initiative, particularly in the case of consciousness-group members and women participating in the Women's Therapy group (as discussed in more detail in
Chapter 6). For these women, with no members of their family of origin in the city and no personal motivation to choose London as their place of residence or work other than marital or personal relations, locality did not function as a significant source of identity except in a specific and significant way for two categories of Centre users.

The first category is that of the mothers, those whose knowledge and use of the environs of the Centre were organized around the facilities available to children – playgrounds, nurseries, clinics, schools, sports centres and libraries. The vast majority of the mothers using the Centre were divorced; four of the five women still meeting regularly as a consciousness-raising group which formerly met at the Centre were both divorced and mothers. (All of these achieved their divorce while participating in the consciousness-raising group). Two members of the Women’s Therapy group also began to use the Centre in the process or aftermath of divorce.

The uses made by the women of their participation in their various groups, their kinship positions and the nature of the kinship relations which they activated are examined in detail in Chapter 4; the point to be made here is that those women who were mothers were involved in the environs of the Centre through their use of the local services and facilities for mothers and children.

The organization of local community around sites of the organization of social reproduction are returned to in 5.3
below. At this point, however, it is significant that the mothers using the Centre were involved in the environs of the Centre in markedly different ways from Centre users without children.

The terms 'vicinity' and 'environs' have been used in this section to distinguish the type of involvement in the locality outlined above from that implied by the term 'neighbourhood', with its connotations of informal ties and reciprocity based on long established residence in a particular area. The Centre users in general were not involved in neighbourly relationships, partly because they lived for the most part in rented accommodation in the private sector, and had moved at least once in the preceding five years. They were a geographically mobile population both in the sense that most had moved to London away from their families of origin and they changed residences within London, albeit usually within the Northern area.

Women who were not mothers were either students or wage workers. The career women at the Centre - rather than those in part-time or short-term employment - comprise the second category of Centre users with a specific relationship with the locality. Those who had professional qualifications and a career were employed in the public sector as employees of the local government, as social workers, a community worker, and the residential worker at the Women’s Refuge referred to above. Their involvement in the locality was therefore structured by
their work, in terms of the provision of services on a local basis, their relations with their colleagues and superiors at work, and their participation in their trade union. These women all participated in the socialist feminist group except one who was part of the Women's Therapy group; two were also involved in the core collective. Their involvement in the locality also was structured by their participation in the organisation of social reproduction, but in this case as providers of services rather than as consumers or clients. This issue, also, is returned to in 6.3 and 6.4.

To recapitulate the points made in this section: the physical location of the Centre and the nature of its environs was not a primary factor in the decisions of Centre users to participate in it rather than another one. Physical distance and accessibility by public or private transport was a limiting factor rather than a positive one. The sense of social, cultural and political proximity to other Centre users rather than physical proximity was the decisive element for Centre users, and indeed for the consciousness-raising group which withdrew from it on the basis of their cultural and political distance from a group of Movement Women who attended a Collective meeting.

The particular locality in which the Centre was situated did not function as a significant source of social identity for Centre users. It was invoked in terms of a geographical destination or boundary, according to
the routes which Centre users took to reach it and the districts in which they operated on a day to day basis as residents, consumers and workers, or according to their past involvement with the Centre. The lack of personal involvement in the locality related to the geographical mobility of most of the Centre users and the relatively short duration of their residence.

The Centre users' involvement in the locality was structured by their participation in the organisation of social reproduction organized by local government, whether as clients of the services and users of the facilities or as employees of the agencies of local government involved in the provision of these services. This point links back to the argument made in 6.1 that the entitlement to social benefits and services is predicated upon an acknowledgement of private needs, and entails the overlapping of the public and the private spheres in the welfare state. This point is developed in 6.3.

6.3 The Centre and the local community

The relationship of Centre users to the locality in which the Women's Centre was established can be usefully distinguished from the relations between the Centre and the local community. The latter set of relations is defined here in terms of local government and discussed in the context of community politics, politics mobilised in terms of 'community power' and 'community action', which
closely interacted with local feminist campaigns.

The term 'community' is, as discussed earlier, a multi-valent one bearing a range of different meanings which interact with each other in different contexts and discourses; during the sixties and seventies, however, the term was mobilised in political discourses by both radicals and governments, indicating an emphasis upon locality, participation, pluralism and alternatives to centralized bureaucracy.

In Allen Cochrane's terms, it was used 'as if it were an aerosol can to be sprayed on to any social programme, giving it a more progressive and sympathetic cachet' (Cochrane, 1986, p. 51). Whether signifying grass-roots action or continuity, morality and the 'natural', the term is inevitably ideological and prescriptive. 'Community', in public discourses at least, is inevitably A Good Thing - highly valued and desirable.

The term 'community' was used in discourses of 'community power' or 'community action' to evoke radical possibilities, relating to 'ordinary' people and everyday lives. The rationales for community action and feminism were closely linked; the two forms of political action also have a great deal in common. Many women came to 'join' the women's movement from community politics in the seventies and many feminist projects could be viewed as examples of community politics conducted by women (Mayo, 1977).

The women's movement shared with other supporters of
community action a belief in the value of local autonomy, participatory democracy, pre-figurative practice and a challenge to the system 'from below'. It also shared the features of a local base (whether a Women's Centre or other feminist grouping) and the objective of producing, through a series of area-based coalitions and alliances, a politics which can move beyond class divisions to mobilize wider sections of the population on the grounds of gender, and restructure the gender-organization of the state, capitalism, and patriarchy.

Community politics provided feminists with a basis for joint action with other women at a 'grass roots' level, and the possibility of creating 'subcultures of mutual self-help' (Rowbotham, 1986). From the feminist point of view, the women's movement offered a paradigm for community politics, and the community action groups provided a fertile recruitment ground for the movement.

The question of why women were more likely to participate in community campaigns than in political parties can be addressed on several levels. First, the mobility of women as mothers and housewives were likely to be restricted at least at certain points in their life cycle, and women spent, then as now, a great deal of time in their immediate neighbourhoods (Bulmer, 1985). Secondly, in a period of widespread disaffiliation from party politics (Gamble, 1981, pp. 31-40) women's rate of participation in political parties at the national and local level fell drastically. Women were not well
represented in the party system or the Trade Union movement. In the Labour party in 1976 the 'B' Lists - the lists for constituency party candidates for nomination as Members of Parliament - proposed only 9% women candidates. In the 'A' Lists - the Trade Union lists - of 1977 just three women's names appeared in a total of 103 (Hills, 1978). Fifteen per cent of the names appearing on the Conservative party list that year were women (The Guardian, 16.4.77).

Despite the number of women entering employment during the period, Women's Trade Union membership increased by just 11% between 1961 and 1979, as compared with an increase in male membership of 17% (Coote and Campbell, 1983). Community politics appeared to offer women a means for securing the local services and facilities which concerned them, without requiring their participation in the meshes of local bureaucracy or the rituals of electoral politics.

Nevertheless, the local community has to be defined in terms of local government. Particular localities are administered by the local state, and the spatial and social structures of local government organise specific territories which are themselves organised by a range of interests at the levels of ward, constituency and borough. Despite their sympathy with and involvement in community action groups, Centre users dealt with the agents of the local government to achieve the Women's Refuge which later provided the site for the first Women's Centre in the
area, and later Riley House. Local government, not local action groups, could provide the resources required for the Centre.

Despite this, the local community was both the source of recruits to the Centre and the target of much of their political activity. The relevance of the local community to the Women's Centres - and vice versa - emerges clearly in Cynthia Cockburn's model of the local community (Cockburn, 1977). In this model, the local community is defined as the locally administered sites of the organisation of social reproduction, the area of social life for women are primarily responsible.

Cockburn specifies three points of organisation; the point of 'collective reproduction', the point at which individuals present themselves as 'clients' of state services; the point of 'employment in reproduction', where the individuals comprise the workforce of the local state, and the point of 'privatized reproduction', that is, family life.

This model links the domestic labour of women and their activities in relation to schools, nurseries, playgrounds, medical institutions and baby's clinics to the operations of the public sphere in the pursuit of everyday life, and thus challenges the exclusive identification of women's domestic labour and child-care activities with the private sphere. The model also links women to the services sector in which an increasing number of women, and an increasing
workers.¹

At the Women's Centre, the women variously cited their disaffection with their positions as wives and mothers and their interest in gaining 'decent' local provision for childcare, more 'serious' medical care and safety in the streets as well as the trivialisation of 'women's issues' by socialist and radical groupings, as objectives. Four of the Centre users, including two members of the core collective, were employed by the Borough of Camden in the 'personal services' department and frequently discussed their disaffection with local government provision. The concept of local community as the site of the organisation of social reproduction seems relevant to these concerns and to the motivations of several Centre users for using the Centre.

During the period of fieldwork the women were involved in three campaigns in the local community, a campaign to save the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women from closure, a campaign for a new nursery and the Reclaim the Night campaign, which included demonstrations at Kings Cross. The latter has been discussed in 6.3; the other two campaigns demonstrate the links between the concerns

¹ Dahrendorf's argument that the 'service class', whether at the local or national level tends to a conservative and or authoritarian political organisation (Dahrendorf, 1964, p. 248) is significantly gender-blind. The part-time and unprotected characteristics of female employment in the service sector have suggested that these conditions produce tendencies to collective solidarity rather than competition and conservatism (Garnsey, 1988). The high proportion of female members and activists in the National Association of Local Government Officers corroborates this suggestion (Beale, 1984).
of local 'community action' groups and the projects of the Centre users. It was relations with local government, however, which proved decisive in the struggle to maintain the Centre rather than with 'community action'; this is returned to in chapter 7.

6.4 The organization of space at the Women's Centre

This section focuses upon the spatial organization of the Centre itself, in relation to its social organization.

Riley House is a large, Victorian building situated in extensive grounds. It had been a nurses residence, and since the period of fieldwork has been re-developed for handicapped children. It was let to the Women's Centre Collective on a one year lease, which was never renewed, although it continued to house the Women's Centre until early 1979.

More than two thirds of the building was declared unfit for habitation, and was boarded off. The plans were not available from the local council; initially they were said, by a housing officer, to be 'with the housing committee'. Later, they were said by a member of that committee to be 'with the developers'. Questions about Riley House tended to be treated warily by council officials and councillors.

Two members of the founding collective who continued in the core collective during the period of fieldwork expressed ambivalence about the site. On the one hand,
they were elated to have secured a site; on the other, as noted in 6.2, they were disappointed by its location. Interestingly, they also expressed some guilt at being ceded the use of such a large building, and some suspicion of the Council’s motives.

Laurie: Oh, it was fabulous to get it. There was some initial disappointment as to where it was, but then we thought if we don’t take this they will never give us anything else, so we’ve got to take it, it’s better than nothing.

Marianne: My first reaction, when I first went into that house, was that we shouldn’t take the place because with so many homeless people, they could be living there. It had bathrooms and beds, when we first went there.

Laurie: It had a huge kitchen, you could easily have fed a hundred people.

Marianne: People who would have been grateful to have it.

Laurie: It was full of furniture, every room packed.

Marianne: Hospital furniture, beds and ....

Laurie: They just took it away.

Marianne: Yes, they took it all to where they re-housed them.

Laurie: No, they just threw it out, most of it. I think they probably took the furniture out to stop us squatting in it, but then in the end....
Marianne: No, but the point was, the major wing with all the bedrooms in it was declared unfit for use and boarded up really quickly. They said the structure was unsound and things could collapse.

One section of the wing available for use was taken up by a caretaker's flat, which one of the Collective occupied. The remainder consisted of a spacious entrance hall, large kitchen, a very large room with two fireplaces on the groundfloor and a small room on the first floor.

The organization of space at the Centre functioned to delineate a hierarchy of oppositions between i) women and men, ii) feminists and non-feminists, iii) non-aligned feminists and Movement Women and iv) 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The first and third sets of oppositions can be demonstrated from strategies of exclusion. The second and fourth sets of oppositions can be shown by an analysis of the social and symbolic organization of space. They are addressed, in order, in the following section.

Women : Men

As noted in 2.1, the Women's Centre was established right at the beginning of its career as a space for women from which all men were excluded. The decision to maintain the exclusion of men in all circumstances was however the subject of debate from the establishment of
the Centre at Riley House subsequent to its move from other premises in Belsize Park. The contestation of woman-only rule arose in the context of a general debate amongst feminist on the political value of ‘separatism’.

Six months after the Centre was established it was agreed that a jumble sale would be held inside the Centre, and that men would be admitted as customers. A member of the Centre core collective, Laurie, and a former member, Marje, both self-designated socialist feminists, recalled the event and its consequences.

Laurie: There was a lot of discussion about men using the Centre. Very tedious.

Marje: Whether men were allowed to come, even for a jumble sale. We did have a jumble sale, inside the Centre.

Laurie: And men did come.

Marje: Yes, once. Absolutely only once. Next time there was a jumble sale the decision was to have it somewhere else, rather than to have men in ....

Laurie: Because men came in and intimidated feminists because this was a Women’s Centre. They were rather aggressive about men not being allowed in to the Women’s Centre, so the women said ‘never again’.

Marje: There was one guy in particular saying ‘what is my girlfriend doing here, why can’t I come
Laurie: Yes, that dutchwoman ate him up. Made him leave.

All subsequent fund raising events were held in a youth club the other side of Belsize Village which was available for 'community events' or in the Town Hall.

The women telling this story were involved in the socialist feminist network, and in some political contexts worked with men. In principle they disagreed with 'separatism' and associated separatism with radical and revolutionary feminists whom they denigrated as politically 'hopeless'. Nevertheless, they reported 'the dutchwoman's' handling of the situation with relish even while supporting political alliances with socialist men in principle, and were clearly determined to continue to exclude men from the Centre. That social space, at least, had to be maintained exclusively for women.

An animated conversation among three members of the consciousness-raising group about their meetings at each other's homes in the early nineteen seventies throws some light upon the circumstances which led them, as married women, to perceive a necessity for a 'woman-only' space outside the domestic sphere. At the time that the conversation took place, Lena and Ingrid were divorced and living alone with their children. Pat was still married, and lived with her husband, son, and parents-in-law.
Ingrid: We had a meeting where all the men were involved. We tried to have a party at my place, which was a complete failure, then we suddenly saw the discrepancy between what we were talking about at meetings and then, seeing us all with our husbands, how appallingly we behaved there. It was so appalling.

Lena: We stayed very separately from the men.

Ingrid: It was a very interesting experience because the men totally took over like we were expecting. We were battling not to let them, but they did.

Lena: They didn't totally take over ....

Ingrid: Well, Edie's husband and Paul, in the end ....

Pat: I have completely wiped this out of my memory!

Lena: I don't think they completely took over, but it was difficult to talk, and we realised we hadn't gained much ....

Pat: Yes, because we had lots of discussions about whether we should include men or not, and half and half .... Everybody thought, well it's very exclusive and we're not getting anywhere. We should bring the men in and let them see what we are doing.

Lena: Ah, we did agree that it had to be ... but we thought we'd bring them to an open meeting ....

Ingrid: I think there comes a time when it becomes unsatisfactory if you can't.
Researcher: Did they all want to come?

Lena: Oh, yes!

Pat: They probably came ....

Lena: To see who was prettiest!

General laughter

Pat: Yes, with their ... ready for battle!

Lena: Certainly my husband had all sorts of sexual fantasies about all these women I talked about.

Pat: Yes, they did, didn’t they.

Lena: Even to the point of thinking ... Ingrid went to Kensington market and bought a necklace and gave it to me and immediately John [her husband] thought she was trying to make up to me and I was too naïve to see it. When we were living in a commune in Canterbury, Lena and Paul, Alec [her husband] and I, he came down and said ‘Oh, what possibilities and you’re not taking them. Look what fun you could have’.

Lena: He really seriously sat down and talked to me and said ‘Lena, you can’t see it, just can not see it, but she is definitely making passes at you, she definitely wants a relationship with you’. He lived on that fantasy for years.

Ingrid: (Laughter) I was too busy ... with my other things.

Pat: They all did this thing; if you had a meeting at your house they would be around the edges, or go out somewhere and always afterwards Colin
[her husband] would say: so and so is nice, I like her. And they all had this thing of picking out one or two who were not, and saying how attractive they were.

Ingrid: Well, Alec and Peter used to want to dress up, and listen at the door, and do anything to break the meeting up. They didn’t in fact, but they always threatened to and I was terrified of having meetings at my house.

Lena: They behaved like children.

Ingrid: They did. Children who were left out of something. They couldn’t bear it, being left out.

Lena: And who is the most beautiful, who is the most powerful, who is the most giggly ... they did anything they could to disrupt it.

This conversation, like the anecdote about the jumble sale, is organized around the women’s perceptions of men’s resentment at their exclusion from the feminist gatherings. In the conversation between the consciousness-raising group members, however, ‘we’ referred to their shared experiences as wives, as well as their shared feminist positions; ‘they’ are the husbands, and their attempts to trivialise, or disrupt the meetings, and to interpret the relationship between Lena and Ingrid as sexual in nature, and the voyeuristic character of their responses are treated with a mixture of amusement and
contempt which signals their solidarity as (former or contemporary) wives, as well as feminists.

The conversation indicates that it was the responses of the husbands, rather than men in general, which underpinned their decision to 'join' a Women's Centre, and also functioned to strengthen the informal links between the women concerned and to further heighten their consciousness of the discrepancies between their marital relations and their feminist ideals. The significance of kinship positions for the different feminist positions adopted by the women and the uses they made of the groups which they attended is explored in Chapter 4. The point to be stressed here is that attempts to incorporate men into female gatherings organized on a feminist basis in both the domestic context and at the Centre were perceived by the women involved as failures. Such experiences were frequently evoked by Centre users as reasons for continuing to exclude men from the Centre, although of all the women quoted, only Lena described herself as 'separatist' and 'anti-men'.

The opposition between Movement Women and other participants in the women's movement was framed in general conversation around the question of 'separatism', and associated with the 'radical feminist' tendency. 'Separatism' was considered a symptom of the divisive tactics employed at the national conferences of the Women's Liberation movement discussed in Chapter 2.

In practice however, there was general agreement
between all the women using the Centre - and those who had withdrawn or moved on - that the Centre should be maintained as a venue for women only. The Centre was considered Sacrosanct, and definitely not to be violated by men. There was no perception of a contradiction between this position and the identification of 'separatism' as divisive and non-productive strategy at the level of feminist political theory. At the Centre, the men : women opposition was clearly marked, without regard for the personal or political relations between individuals or groups. This consensus removed one of the most bitterly contested debates from the local level at the Centre, even while individual women, particularly from the socialist feminist group, because embroiled in the debate at socialist feminist meetings and the National Conferences.

ii) Feminists : non-feminists

The criteria employed by women at the Centre in assessing which individual women constituted 'feminists' have been considered in 2.4. The example of the women who visited the Centre without any apparent knowledge of feminist language use or social organisation and unaccompanied by a woman known to other Centre users, being assumed to be a 'client' which is recounted in the same chapter, demonstrates that these criteria were employed at the level of routinized and unreflective behaviour. There was no indication that Marianne, the Centre user who greeted her, had any reason to
deliberately exclude her from the Collective meeting which was in progress, or from the Centre. The visitor just did not display any of the knowledge which underpins the mutual recognition of feminists.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, this knowledge was available to women both through participation in a feminist group or organization or from feminist books, articles or magazines. Two related questions are raised immediately by this incident; first, how a woman interested in the Centre, but whose information concerning it was derived from non-feminist rather than feminist sources could gain access to the community of Centre users, and secondly, the extent to which the identification of all women as potential feminists (discussed in 2.2) was one of the practices at the Centre.

Interestingly, it appears that, during the period of fieldwork at least, the recruitment of women to the Centre, and thus the recruitment of women to the feminist cause, was not a priority for Centre users. The Centre did not constitute one of the venues at which a first participation in a feminist group was available as an initiation into the women's movement.

At first sight, this fits in with the movement position expressed by writers and activists such as Sheila Rowbotham and Elizabeth Wilson, that the 'educative' phase of the movement should give way to a phase of 'organisation' (Rowbotham, 1972; Wilson, 1973). This position suggests that women who were already-constituted
feminists should concentrate on organising for the achievement of short term objectives rather than ‘educating’ women in feminist views of the world.

In itself, however, this does not explain the situation because at least four of the Centre users first participated in a feminist group at the Centre after 1975. Rather, the Centre users’ perceptions of their Centre community as under threat led them to close ranks and to relegate the recruitment of additional women to the movement and the Centre to a level of secondary importance. The means for maintaining the existence of a Centre community were perceived as the activation of social networks already in place and the cultivation of informal relationships with local councillors – individuals ‘outside’ both the Centre and the movement – rather than the mobilisation of support from local women.

The principle that all women are potential feminists was not challenged by Centre users but in the circumstances in which they found themselves, Centre users privileged feminists and individuals who had influence in local government over local women who were clearly not feminists and were not known to have any local influence.

The women from the local area who did not display feminist knowledge thus achieved access to Riley House but not to the Centre community. Women who were not known to any of the Centre users and did not arrive at the Centre with information about a feminist campaign or another feminist grouping, or did not display feminist credentials
through their knowledge of language use and movement organisation practices were taken to be 'clients'.

The local women who visited the Centre 'heard about' it from other women in the locality, from the notices posted around the area, and from the local press. The notices and press coverage focussed on the information and advice services available to the Centre, and its function as a 'drop in' Centre. No local woman 'dropped in' for company or conversation during the period of fieldwork, however. The women who visited the Centre were taken to be in pursuit of hard information regarding personal problems - which, of course, were viewed as symptoms of political problems by the Centre users - rather than recreation. Whether this was their initial intention or not, the local women's reception by Centre users constituted them as 'clients' and the ensuing conversations were organized in terms of problems, information, and advice.

As clients, these women were taken to the hearth regularly used as the venue for dispensing information and advice, and offered tea or coffee. When the clients accepted the offer, they were not taken to the kitchen with the Centre user, but left sitting alone until the tea or coffee was brought to them. Clients, then, were exempted from the co-operative mode of organization prevalent at the Centre; they were not incorporated into the routines of preparing drinks. They did not ever get up and wander round the Centre, or ask to be taken around. They stayed where they were, and awaited the return of the
Centre user who had greeted them.

This structure of events can, significantly, be viewed as deriving its rationale from both the private and public domains. At one level, the client was positioned as a guest, with the Centre user adopting the role of hostess. The practice of a single Centre user detaching herself from a meeting, a communal meal or an informal conversation, greeting the visitor, seating her at a fireplace and going to get her a cup of tea or coffee were redolent of domesticity. Further, no other woman joined the conversation or approached the participants unless asked to by the Centre user involved. The encounters between the visiting woman and the Centre user occurred in a circle of privacy.

The informal and personal dimension of feminist practice was clear, and the situation was structured as it would generally be in a domestic context. At another level, however, the services provided in the course of the conversation at the hearth over the tea or coffee mirrored the services provided at the point of 'employment in reproduction' noted in 6.3. The advice and information offered contributed to the client's organization of social reproduction. The point of employment in reproduction, it has been argued, exists at the interface of the public and the private. The encounters between clients and Centre users therefore contained echoes of interactions in the public domain.

This importation of aspects of the public domain was
underlined by the fact that all four of the women who regularly talked to the clients were employed in the public sector.

The employment of the women concerned in the public sector no doubt contributed to their knowledge of the facilities available to the local women, their legal rights, and the appropriate agencies to which they should be referred. The details of the advice/information sessions were in principle kept confidential. On three occasions they were discussed after the client left: one woman had been referred to a Law Centre to obtain a legal injunction against her husband from whom she was separated; two had been informed of the social benefits to which they were entitled and one very young woman was referred to a named General Practitioner for counselling about an abortion. On another occasion Clare, the residential worker at the Women’s Refuge was called over to join in the conversation.

The issues under discussion then all appeared, in those cases which were discussed, to revolve around family relations and pregnancy, the classical concerns of the women’s movement which were the content of most coverage of the movement in the local and national press. Both public perceptions of the role of Centre and Centre users’ perceptions of the women visiting the Centre who did not immediately signal feminist credentials functioned to position the non-feminist women as clients.

This distinction between feminists and non-feminists
and the relations which were established between them did not constitute an opposition in the sense that one category of women defined themselves against and in opposition to the other. Nevertheless the two were clearly differentiated and structured according to the positions of service providers and service consumers in ways very similar to those deployed in the formal agencies of the public domain.

Relations between Centre users and local women were, then, generally structured by an alternative mode of the organisation of social reproduction, one geared to provide maximum empowerment for the client concerned in the context of the current legal and political situation. There was no evidence of Centre users and visiting local women 'sharing' experiences, or of Centre users rallying support for particular local campaigns although posters advertising meetings and campaigns were displayed and photocopied texts were piled up in the entrance hall.¹ While the Women's Centre was regarded by Centre users as 'at place belonging to everybody' the organization of space and of social interaction at Riley House indicated clearly that it 'belonged' to Centre users and other feminists on very different terms that it 'belonged' to the non-feminist women whom it in principle existed to serve.

¹ The client - Centre user relations pre-figured those which became institutionalized in the Women's Centres of the 1980s through the auspices of Women's Committees in local government and the policies of the Greater London Council.
The differentiation of feminists and non-feminists took the form, at the Centre, of the subsumption of non-feminist women to the category of clients. There is no evidence of a strategic exclusion of women who were not accredited feminists from the Centre community; rather, the project of achieving the survival of the Centre and the element of feminist service to their sisters worked together to preclude the full incorporation of local women into the Centre.

iii) 'Non-aligned feminists': Movement Women

The distinction drawn by Centre users between feminists who visited the Centre as individuals bringing news of other feminist organizations and campaigns and those who attempted to use the Centre either as pre-constituted groups or as representatives of these groups was made on strategic grounds.

As discussed in 2.1 and 2.2, not all women with generally accepted feminist credentials were admitted to the Centre. The Wages for Housework Collective has been mentioned as one group which was denied regular access, on the grounds that they were ultimately non-feminist. The case of the Wages for Housework Collective is one example of a wider category of feminist groups and individual feminists who were denied access.

This category was defined by Centre users and many other feminists as those who belonged to a group or organization which claimed a primary allegiance to their particular programme, theories or lifestyles, claimed
these as the only 'true' versions and actively opposed different versions of feminism. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this category of women have been termed, after a Centre user's description of them, as 'Movement Women with capitals', and are classified in this thesis as constituting the sectarian dimension of the women's movement. Many Centre users and former Centre users perceived them as dangerous. Many associated Movement Women with radical feminism even when the women themselves did not claim the title (as noted in Chapter 3 in the case of the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist group).

It may be useful here to re-iterate the point made in Chapter 3, that not all radical feminists were Movement Women and not all Movement Women were radical feminists.

At the Centre two women, Ellen and Linda, who attended Collective meetings, considered themselves radical feminists, would not co-operate with any political action involving men, and did not believe in a reformist approach - 'Beggars can't be choosers'. Nevertheless, at the Centre they were included in the Riley House community of identification, took their turns at cooking meals and clearing up and joined the discussions of how best to secure a new, separate site from the Council, as well as supporting the Reclaim the Night campaign, the Women's Right to choose campaign (against legislation which proposed to restrict women's access to abortion) and the EGA Stays' campaign.
designated herself a radical feminist, on the grounds that she was ‘anti-men’. She nevertheless supported her group’s decision to stop using the Centre when the ‘radical lesbian’ group attended a Collective meeting, and expressed the shared opinion that she did not want to be involved with those women, whom she described as ‘awful’.

As noted in Chapter 7, the consciousness-raising group supported, and to some extent identified with the Women’s Centre of on the basis of their experience there. The radical lesbians were regarded by them as aberrations, not as representative of the Centre.

Individual ‘radical feminists’, and women participating in the Women’s Therapy Group, who shared some of the theory and agreed with some of the strategies promulgated under the rubric of ‘radical feminism’, both participated in and identified with the Centre community. The women who were excluded were those who were viewed as opposed to the projects and positions of the Centre women and as planning to use the Centre as a means of ‘converting’ women to their own brand of feminism.

The strategic exclusion of these individuals and groups was achieved by the policy of ‘non-aligned’ groups and individuals being offered access only to some of the movement venues. In the case of the Centre, however, it transpired that this policy was not operated against Movement Women - it was not explicitly applied at the Centre until after the incidents involving Wages for Housework and the radical lesbians in 1976 - but against
women whose primary allegiance was deemed to be with a socialist group rather than the women's movement.

Interestingly, this policy of non-alignment was formulated by the socialist feminist grouping which met, initially, in a Women's Bus. Laurie described the context in which the policy was formulated in the following way:

At the very beginning of the socialist feminist group, in fact at the second meeting in the bus, there was a big discussion because of the whole history of aligned women, being more articulate, more coherent, talking more at conferences. There was a whole fear of them, and the South London socialist feminist group - they formed before the North London one did - had this long discussion because they very strongly did not want any aligned women and so it became an issue at the second meeting. At the end people said it's alright that aligned women join as long as they don’t see themselves as coming here to convert everybody to the party and imposing the party line on the group. And nobody ever did and nobody ever discussed it again as far as I remember.

... There's a big difference between coming along as a feminist who is also a socialist and laying down what is obviously a line and making everyone adhere to it. Now that has never happened in the group so it never became an issue. But it was a disappointment at the beginning because there was a fear of it.

The 'fear' of attempts at imposing the 'party line' which Laurie reported was realised for many women in other groups. It also echoes the disaffection with the 'lines' dictated by the older political generations from which women’s movement developed. First, the 'New Left' - exemplified a variety of by maoists, trotskyists and marxists noted in Chapter 3 in the discussion of the emergence of the first women’s liberation - groups and second the 'Old Left' embodied by some of the trade unionists and Labour and Communist party members with whom the socialist feminists continued to work politically.
The compromise between acceptable 'aligned' feminists and feminists bent on 'conversion' and adhering to a 'line' was fairly typical of the tensions generally characterising the relations between feminists - not only socialist feminists - and the older political generations of 'the Left'. Social relations with individuals from the older generations were maintained by many of the Centre users and, as argued in Chapters 3 and 7, these could be activated as social resources for the Centre. The propagation of 'socialist' views and the deployment of skills and tactics acquired in socialist groups or organisations at feminist meetings or conferences however, were not acceptable.

The decision for women to police themselves, rather than for all 'aligned' women to be excluded from feminist meetings was a characteristically feminist solution to the problem. At the Centre, women claimed continually that 'we are a non-aligned Centre', although at least two of the women in the socialist feminist group and two of the Core Collective were active in socialist organisations. The assertion that the Centre was 'non-aligned' should presumably be interpreted as an indication that the Centre users were satisfied that no one at Riley House was dominating a meeting, 'selling' a party line or trying to convert other feminists to a particular socialist position; in other words, no one was perceived to be transgressing the ground rules for feminist 'co-operative discourse', which is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.
The policy strategically excluding 'aligned' women can be reformulated in the context of the Centre and the socialist feminist group meetings as a policy of strategically excluding the practices of socialist organizations. The women themselves were allowed to participate in feminist groups as long as they conformed to the agreed forms of behaviour. The social spaces of the Women's Centre had to be used in any acceptably feminist way.

Another significant point that emerges from Laurie's account is that it provides an illustration of the ways in which individual Centre users participated in the feminist social networks which extended both across the field of the women's movement and beyond it, into other political groups and organizations. As noted earlier, these included some of those in reaction to which the women's liberation movement emerged. The movement of Centre users across the boundary of the Centre, and the means by which their participation in other groups was converted into a set of practices at the Centre which could be rendered acceptable to all the women there provides an example of how different political positions could be accommodated without the divisions which occurred at national conferences.

The perceived opposition between 'non-aligned' and Movement Women maintained at the Centre needs to be expanded to include an opposition between 'non-aligned' practices and those practices which are taken to signal
"alignment". The women who were excluded in this case were those individuals who would not, or could not, adopt forms of behaviour acceptable to either feminists at the socialist feminist groups meeting outside the Centre, (who defined the limits of acceptable forms) or to Centre users (who agreed with these limits).

The Movement Women who were excluded were those who wished to use the Centre as pre-constituted groups or organizations - the radical lesbians and Wages for Housework - whose styles of social interaction were also deemed unacceptable by the Centre users at Collective meetings.

An argument could be made that both these categories of women should be included in the category of non-feminists, because their styles of behaviour and political positions were ultimately classified as not primarily feminist, or as transgressing feminist ground rules. This however, would overlook their generally accepted self-designation as feminist. The negotiation of difference between feminists rather than the elimination of certain groups and individuals from a category of 'feminists' is what is at issue here. The opposition between non-aligned feminists and both Movement Women and those socialist women who refused to conform to the ground rules of feminist practice at the Centre was negotiated in such a way that no confrontation between the opposing factions arose at the Centre.
iv) Insiders : Outsiders

The distinction between 'insiders' - regular Centre users who identified with the Centre community - and 'outsiders' - feminists from other groups who visited the Centre - is not a clear one. Most of the visiting feminists were acquainted with at least one of the Centre users, as emphasised earlier. These women usually accompanied their acquaintance to the Centre, often in time to join the meal, and usually entered into a conversation with other women fairly quickly.

They frequently brought posters or leaflets with them, which they would usually put on the chest in the entrance hall, either instructed by the woman they accompanied, or on the basis of experience gained on earlier visits. This entrance hall comprised an intermediate zone between the inside and the outside of the Centre. It was crossed by women entering the building, en route to the main room directly opposite the front door and by women going upstairs or between the main room and the kitchen or cloakroom. Posters were displayed, leaflets and photocopies were left here.

No one used the hall for any length of time however; it did not comprise a meeting place. Only local women visiting the Centre for the first time - often the only time - tended to wait there. This was partly because the hall was cold; even in summer it was not warm during the evenings. It was also because the main business of the Centre was conducted in the main room beyond it, with the
Women's Therapy group meeting upstairs, and in some senses thereby marginalised. The position of the Women's Therapy group is returned to in Chapter 6; I want to concentrate here on the role the use of the entrance hall played in indicating whether an unaccompanied woman not personally known to the Centre users present was an insider, an outsider, or a client.

As noted above, local women who were treated as clients tended to hesitate in the hall until they were noticed. Centre users would typically go straight to the main room, 'to see who's here'. Unaccompanied visiting feminists tended to enter the Centre briskly and immediately go to the doorway of the main room, sometimes despositing any papers they had on the chest first as described above. They would not usually enter the room, unless there were women nearby, but would speak from the doorway, introducing themselves by reference to the feminist capacity in which they were visiting.

One woman who came alone announced: 'I've brought the posters for the march against the Benyon Bill'. Another introduced herself with 'I've come to see what arrangements need to be made about the socialist feminist conference'.

In other words, they introduced themselves as active feminists, visiting the Centre with a mission. Usually, accompanied or alone, they arrived on Thursday evenings when the Collective met and were included in the meeting.

They were accepted as partners in an exchange of
information and gossip, and as feminists with whom collective activities would be mutually undertaken. They were treated as co-members of the encompassing community of feminism and as fellow participants in the women’s movement; that is as potential Centre users.

Their ‘outsider’ status was clear however from their lack of spatial knowledge (‘Where’s the loo?’) and their non-participation in routine chores. They did not participate in the preparation of coffee in the kitchen, or the carrying of used crockery back to the kitchen after meals, and these omissions indicated their ‘visitor’ status, particularly because the more politically active Centre users also tended to do a greater amount of cooking and clearing up than the less involved women. The visitors were politically active women with a mission, but were not included in the division of labour on the same terms as the Centre users.

They were ‘outsiders’ in terms of their lack of knowledge of the everyday routines of the Centre, of personal knowledge about other Centre users and of the Centre versions of stories about particular events or individuals described in 2.4 as comprising the shared stock of knowledge which constituted the foundations of the Centre community. They had, and usually displayed in their conversation, ‘regional’ knowledge; they did not, at least on their first or second visit, have access to ‘local’ knowledge.

The distinction between regular visitors, and Centre
users who also attended other feminist groups regularly is a difficult one to establish analytically in any hard and fast way. I have included as Centre users women who attended the Centre at least four times, and knew at least half a dozen of the women at the Centre socially as well as from meetings at the Centre. It was in these circumstances that the woman concerned was expected by other Centre users to take her turn at the chores, to be able to locate tea or coffee or biscuits, to know where the various groups met, and what occurred at Collective meetings. Part of this stock of knowledge, for example what happened at the meetings, may have been acquired outside the Centre 'through the grapevine', but the rest required regular participation. Ultimately however, it was her recognition by other Centre users as one of them, which depended upon participation and shared knowledge of the kinds listed above, which provided the grounds for classifying a woman as an 'insider'.

The distinction between an 'outsider' and a 'client' was clearly perceived by Centre users and clearly marked, as is evident from the different places to which the different categories of women were assigned, in terms of both physical and social space. As far as I am aware, no Movement Woman came to the Centre during the period of field work (either because Movement Women had heard that they were not welcome, or because of their tendency to operate as groups rather than individuals and therefore were by definition excluded and knew this).
The women using the Centre on any particular evening frequently comprised a mixture of 'insiders', feminist 'outsiders' and less frequently 'clients'. Both insiders and outsiders could recognize a 'client' (just as 'it takes a feminist to know a feminist' at feminist venues feminists also 'knew' a non-feminist). It seems unlikely that the local women could - or tried to - differentiate between an 'insider' and an 'outsider'.

In summary, access to the physical site of the Centre was structured firstly in terms of the opposition between women and men; secondly knowledge of its social and symbolic spatial organisation comprised one of the key means by which 'insiders' achieved their status as one of 'us' and signalled it.

To recapitulate: the exclusion of certain styles of interaction and oral communication, together with the exclusion of women coming to the Centre as a pre-constituted group, maintained the Centre as space for 'non-aligned' women and precluded any of the confrontations which occurred at meetings or conferences open to all feminists.

Local women who failed to indicate feminist credentials were constructed as 'clients' and the relations between Centre users and 'clients' were clearly marked by their spatial organization and the convergence of elements of both the private and public domains.

Feminists who primarily participated in other groups were included in Centre meetings, meals and conversations
on the basis of their 'regional' knowledge but were marked out by their lack of 'local' knowledge. They literally waited on the threshold of the main room while they introduced themselves (though they ventured further than the local women who waited in the hall).

The Centre existed at the interface of the public and the private domains. Provided with Riley House by the local government, the Centre was managed by its users and had a fair degree of autonomy. Suspicions of the Council's motives at providing such a large place, with most of its rooms boarded off, and disappointed by its location near Belsize Park, the Centre users nevertheless were pleased to get Riley House, and were determined to acquire another site for their use alone when Riley House was re-claimed.

The Centre constructed local non-feminists as 'clients' and offered information, advice and referral services which mirrored those provided by the (then) Department of Health and Social Security and the agencies of local government, but they offered additional information and different advice and often referred the 'clients' to different destinations than was the case at the point of 'employment in reproduction'. The relations between Centre users and 'clients' were also structured in terms of relations predominant in the private sphere.

The relations between the Centre users and their local area were mediated by their information/advice service, which was advertised outside the Town Hall, the local
offices of the D.H.S.S. and at some of the local playgrounds. The physical environment around the Centre was also marked by graffiti ('Women Against Violence Against Women', 'EGA stays, O.K.') but no one at the Centre claimed to have contributed. At this point in its career, the survival of the Centre together with the maintenance of the advice services, was central in the collective activities of the Centre users although the feminist socialist group and Women's Therapy Group were of central importance to some of their individual members, as discussed in Chapter 7.

The space in which the Centre has to be located, in brief, is the social and symbolic terrain of the women's movement and the political and moral dimensions of the mapping of the public and private and their gender organization.

**Time and space**

In the context of place and space, it is also necessary to look at time; time as a resource structured the use of the Centre and, as noted in 6.2, time also structured the use of public space by all women in the city.

As a resource, time was in scarce supply for many of the women at the Centre. While none of the Centre users (even the few who were married) organised their everyday lives around the work schedules of husbands, which is a common feature of the organisation of time by most married
women (Oakley, 1974; Frost, 1977) the mothers at the Centre organised their time around their children, most of whom were under ten years of age. This made day time attendance at the Centre difficult for the mothers to organise in the daytime except for those with children at school. Similarly, the employed women could not attend regularly during the day. For these reasons, the Centre was used only in the evenings and at the weekend, thus limiting its accessibility for local women.

Initially, the Centre had been open in the day, with a woman in attendance throughout the week. Very few women turned up, however, and no other Centre users offered to take over the day shift, so the attempt at keeping the Centre open all day was abandoned.

Time constraints not only structured the use of the Centre as a social space; they also had some influence on the social composition of the Centre and a division of labour when asked why so few women with children attended the Collective meeting, a woman answered 'because they only have time to come to the group meeting'. Three women with children had left the Centre altogether before the period of fieldwork. A Centre user described the circumstances of one of these:

She got very depressed and very fed up. She got really tired. So she just dropped out totally. I don’t think she’s ever been back.

Considering that most of the mothers at the Centre were single parents, this may well have been a common situation.
No Centre user brought her child to a meeting at the Centre, although a few ‘dropped something off’ there with a child in tow. Only the ‘Clients’ came to spend any length of time at the Centre accompanied by children. This practice of attending without children, also militated against mothers using the Centre regularly; for most of them, time spent at the Centre had monetary as well as social value, since they paid babysitters to look after their children if they could not gain the services of a friend. Participation in a group must have been seen as worth the money, but participation in a Collective meeting to discuss the everyday matters of the Centre, fund raising events and the course of the negotiations with the Council was not, unless an important issue (such as the proposal to share a site) was on the agenda.

The other activities of Centre users, and especially of women without cars, were also constrained at night time, not just because of child care arrangements or because of the dangers women perceived in walking alone at night, but because physical distances appeared greater at night to several of the women. When a meeting or other activity was announced, if it was scheduled for the evening, a Centre user responded on several occasions ‘Oh, that’s too far to go in the evening’. The effort involved in travelling, even across the borough, was evidently felt to be greater at night – partly because of restricted public transport services’ – than in the daytime, and this was expressed in the response ‘that’s too far’. In general,
then the participation of women in other feminist groups, as well as their use of the Centre was structured by time as well as distance.

Time structured social relations at the Centre in other ways than as a social resource or an element involved in calculating distance. As noted in 6.1, the use of public space by all women, particularly pedestrians and public transport users, was regulated according to the time in the twenty four hour cycle, and this regulation was opposed by the Reclaim the Night Campaign. At the Centre, two women in addition to the two who were self-designated radical feminists Ellen and Linda who joined the campaigners on two demonstrations, one at Kings Cross and one in Soho. These demonstrations provided social spaces for Centre women to join with other feminists, many of whom claimed the title 'radical feminists' and most of whom were attributed with it by others. These proved to be spaces of co-operation, not confrontation.

A further dimension of time has also been identified in 2.4 and 3.4; the length of time women had been involved in the women's movement. Women of the 'older generation' of feminists - with reference to the duration of their involvement rather than chronological or social age - were accorded more respect by Centre users. Their involvement in the political and social spaces of the early women's liberation groups, together with their familiarity with some of the key venues of the early movement (Ruskin College, Oxford for the first National Conference, the
London Women's Liberation Workshop, early Women's Centres in London such as The Hole in the Wall in the East of the borough) was a source of prestige.

The spatial organisation of the Centre, in its social and symbolic as well as physical dimensions, then, was structured in various ways by time; as a social resource, in relation to the temporal organisation of women's use of public space, and in terms of the length of time which individual women had spent in the movement.

The spatial organisation of the Centre itself and its meanings, to summarize the key points of the argument, has to be considered in a broader context of the gender organisation of space, in relation to the content, range and meanings of the public and private domains and in relation to feminist strategies for the re-articulation of these domains and for the re-organisation of gender relations which the public/private distinction underpinned. It also has to be viewed in relation to both a rhetoric of 'community', its relations with community action and the model of 'community' as the site of the organisation of social reproduction. This model demonstrates the triple presence of women at the points of Collective and privatised social reproduction and the point of employment in reproduction, which, it is argued, was a significant factor in promoting an identification between women as employees and wives and mothers and recruiting women to feminist organisations.

It is also argued that the Centre provided an
alternative space for local women to gain access to services and facilities comparable to those available at the point of employment in reproduction but including different - or additional - information and advice.

Finally, the most significantly for the negotiation of feminist identity at the Centre, it has been argued that the organization of space demonstrates the ways in which Centre users organised difference; the primary 'us' and 'them' opposition between women and men emerges from the exclusion of men from the Centre in all circumstances, and is linked to the experience of women as feminists attempting to organise in the private domain. The relations between feminists and non-feminists was demonstrated by the classification of local non-feminist women as 'clients' as opposed to the partial inclusion of non-Centre user feminists on the basis of their 'regional' knowledge.

The distinction and potential opposition between Centre users and 'aligned' women was resolved by the exclusion of particular practices, rather than of individual women. The only formally agreed exclusions were applied to women already participating in established groups or organisations, who were perceived as possible Movement Woman. The distinctions between regular Centre users and 'outsider' feminists were outlined in terms of their restricted use of Centre space and their restricted participation in the organisation of labour and 'local knowledge'.
At the level of the organisation of the Centre, the projects and strategies of Centre users and their perceptions of their social and cultural position as women, questions of space - and to some extent, time - were highly significant.
7. THE WOMEN'S CENTRE AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITY; NEGOTIATIONS AND IDENTITIES

The Women's Centre was engaged throughout the period of fieldwork in negotiations with the local authority for a new site when Riley House, for which the women had been given a short lease, was due to be redeveloped. This Chapter examines the processes involved in the negotiations, the relations between Centre users, the local authority and individual councillors, and between Centre users and other feminist groupings. It argues that the negotiation of instrumental objectives is an essential element in the construction of a social identity, and therefore takes issue with the school of thought which defines the "new" social movements and their component groupings as primarily expressive and identity-oriented (Melucci, 1980; Offe, 1987; Castells, 1983). In the case of the Women's Centre the instrumental and expressive dimensions are closely intertwined.

It also examines the relations of identity and difference mobilised by Centre users in relation to other feminist groupings, which functioned to promote a distinctive feminist community of collective identification at the Centre within the encompassing community of feminism with which all the groups identify, in the name of feminism itself.

Finally, it examines the informal power relations in play in the negotiations between the Centre users and the
local government agents, and argues that these relations function as reciprocal exchanges, rather than resting upon the mobilisation of feminist organization by political agents as "auxiliary political resources", as proposed by a number of analysts (Pym, 1974; March and Chambers, 1981; Randall, 1982). These cross-boundary relations worked paradoxically to demarcate the boundaries of the Centre community.

7.1. **Definitions of the new social movements and the expressive and instrumental dimensions**

Definitions of the 'new' social movements, with reference to those emerging from 1960 onwards, are invariably defined with particular emphasis upon their expressive, identity-oriented aspects (Castells, 1983; Touraine, 1981; Hall, 1976; Melucci, 1980; Offe, 1977, 1984, 1987). The analysis of the negotiations between the Women's Centre, as a concrete local manifestation of the women's movement, and the local government indicate, however, that the expressive and instrumental dimensions are closely intertwined, and that the feminist identity was continually contested and re-negotiated rather than a stable and unproblematic entity which permitted any simple form of expression. The polemical practices of collective identification and the changing constellations of communities of identity which emerged during the negotiations with 'The Council' cannot be simply or
unequivocally assigned to either dimension.

At the general level, social movements have been defined in terms of extra-parliamentary action and in terms of synthesis and fusion as opposed to differentiation. Claus Offe argues that there is little vertical differentiation of insiders versus outsiders, and little horizontal differentiation i.e. hierarchical organization (Offe, 1987).

Offe's analysis distinguishes between internal and external modes of action. The internal modes are characterised by i) informality, ii) spontaneity and iii) by actors acting not on behalf of their socio-economic interests but on behalf of ascriptive collectivities. The external modes of action are defined as radical protest politics, articulated in terms of negatively phrased demands which are presented as 'beyond negotiation'. In his view,

'social movements cannot negotiate because they do not have anything to exchange for concessions' (Offe, 1987, p. 71).

In relation to the Women's Movement, only the first of Offe's definitional criteria of modes of action obtain, and that only partially. While the women's movement, and its particular manifestation at Riley House, was organized in terms of informal relations, leaderlessness and participation as opposed to representation, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3, vertical differentiation and a degree of social closure did emerge in the course of cross-boundary negotiations, a mode of action which is
itself specifically excluded in Offe's model.

Secondly, while in Gramsci's terms many of the actions and activities of the Women's Movement were spontaneous (rather than organized through political parties), others were organized - or at least co-ordinated - at a national level, most notably the National Abortion Campaign, which was orchestrated by paid workers - one of whom was a member of the founding Centre Collective - and in collaboration, albeit uneasy collaboration, with political parties, both the Labour party and the Communist party of Great Britain.

Offe's emphasis upon the primacy of 'ascriptive collectivities' in the new social movements and the stress upon the expressive identity-oriented dimensions common to all the approaches cited above, requires closer examination in the context of the Women's Centre. It is extended and discussed in detail by Melucci (1980) who formulates the key dynamic of social movements in terms of a struggle for the control of social reproduction and argues that:

'The struggle centres around the issue of group identity; there is a return to the criterion of ascriptive membership (sex, age, race, locality) which is the form taken by revolt against change directed from above .... The movements also have instrumental objectives and seek advantages within the political system, but this dimension is secondary in comparison with the search for solidarity and the expressive nature of the relations found in them' (Melucci, 1980, p. 217).

Leaving aside the question of 'change directed from
above' rather than residual, social and cultural factors as the key motivating factor, and the question of whether locality can be unambiguously established as ascribed in advanced industrial society, the point at issue here is whether 'group identity' can be assigned primacy in the definition of social movements in simple ascriptive terms.

The analysis of the Women's Centre demonstrates firstly, that 'instrumental objectives' cannot be analytically separated from the 'expressive' dimension in any clear and continuing manner. Secondly, it suggests that it is very unlikely that there is a single unproblematic 'group identity' - or even a single 'quasi-group' identity, in Dahrendorf's phrase (Dahrendorf, 1967) - in any of the new social movements. The changing constellations of identification evident at the Centre contradict Mellucci's assertion; the apparently simple category of 'group identity' which he adopts in fact obscures the complexities of identity politics. The reference to the 'expressive nature' of relations in the social movements also obscures the question of exactly what is being expressed by a Social Movement in any particular form or manifestation, in a specific context of situation at a particular historical movement, apart from a 'revolt' against imposed changes or the continuity of inherited cultural definitions in a period of rapid social change.

Melucci's brisk reference to 'the criterion of
ascriptive membership' also raises specific problems in relation to the Women's Movement which neither he, Offe, Castells or Hall directly address. While 'membership' is specifically limited by sex, or gender, gender ascription was (and is) itself an object of struggle. Gender can be usefully defined, in Pollock's terms as

'a web of psycho-social relationships which institute a socially significant difference on the axes of sex, which is so deeply located in our very sense of lived sexual identity that it appears to us as natural and unalterable' (Pollock, 1982, p. 37),

Gender difference is seen as socially ascribed, but is also seen by feminists as alterable and variable.

The British women's movement differed from the American movement during the late nineteen seventies in the extent to which gender rather than sex was taken as the key category. While British radical feminists, like their American Counterparts, attributed the subordination of women to an essentialist distinction between the sexes on the basis of 'male dominance' (Millett, 1972; Spender, 1977; Hartmann, 1983; Segal, 1986), they constituted a minority, albeit a vocal one, of the heterogeneous women's movement as defined in 2.2. For the majority of feminists, and for all Riley House Centre users the ascribed identity 'woman' was precisely the object of struggle as well as an initial basis for identification. The liberated identity, the objective of the women's movement, was to be achieved through struggle. It could not be ascribed.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 'Being a Woman' was a
necessary but not sufficient basis for recognition and acceptance as a feminist, let alone a member of the women's movement which implied active participation in a group or organization, although obviously, being a woman was perceived as the basis of sisterhood. Even being socially recognised as feminist was not sufficient to gain access to Riley House, as discussed in Chapter 2. The achievement of new perceptions of sex and gender relations, and an active involvement in struggles to change them was taken as a basic aspect of feminist identity. Without that objective, whether pursued at a personal level of everyday life or pursued collectively, a woman was not seen as having 'joined' the movement (Delmar, 1976; Mitchell, 1984). The instrumental dimension - the achievement of objectives - was therefore central to a feminist identity as defined by participants of the women's movement, rather than secondary.

The apparently simple criterion of 'Sex' for membership of the Women's Movement was further complicated by the other aspects of personal identity; as argued in Chapter 4, there is no single, unitary basis of either individual or collective identity whether ascribed or achieved; relations of generation, class, sexuality and ethnicity all articulate in different ways with relations of gender. 'The search for solidarity' which Melucci sees as central to social movements proceeded at the Women's Centre and within the movement as a whole as a search for 'unity in diversity' (Wilson, 1979; Hamilton and Barrett,
1987) rather than emerging unproblematically as an effect of the ascriptive criterion of sex. It proceeded through a series of distinctions and combinations, rather than arising from a single unproblematic 'group identity'. The negotiations between the local authority and the Women's Centre for instrumental purposes which are analysed in 7.3 constitute an example of the processes whereby both social attributions of a gender based identity and feminist self-definisions are re-negotiated.

It is also clear that the modes of external action specified by Offe do not apply in the case of the Women's Centre. Not all demands are negatively phrased, and not all issues are perceived as 'beyond negotiation'. While central issues were beyond compromise, short term objectives were actively negotiated.

To take the question of demands first. The first four demands of the Women's Liberation Movement which were issued at the founding conference in 1970, and those which were issued at subsequent national conferences were all framed in positive terms and were actively pursued through parliamentary lobbying and pressure on political parties and trade unions, as well as direct action.

Radical feminists mobilised around a number of negatively phrased slogans - 'Beggars Can't be Choosers', 'Women Against Violence Against Women'; but along with other feminists, they also mobilised around positive ones - 'Reclaim the Night' - and mixed ones too, 'Abortion on demand and without apology'.
The tactics of the women's movement were more varied and complex than Offe's general definition suggests, partly because, like other social movements, it was not a unitary and singular entity. Further Offe's attempt at an unproblematic distinction between 'internal' and 'external' modes of action - unwise in the light of his own observation of a general lack of vertical differentiation between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' - obscures the interaction between negotiation for instrumental objectives and the re-negotiation of identity. This interaction is addressed below in the context of the Women's Centre.

7.2. Negotiations for resources and the re-negotiation of identity at the Women's Centre

The negotiations with 'the Council' provide a context for the analysis of the changing configuration of the Centre, the processes by which its constituent groups aligned to produce a sense of community distinct from both the encompassing community of feminism articulated in the discourses, codes and practices of the women's movement and from the component groups pursuing their related but distinct activities under the umbrella of the Centre.

'Community' is addressed here as a process rather than an accomplished social entity, a set of practices of collective identification as argued in Chapter 2. In other words, a community is a set of objectively observed
practices producing a subjective sense of 'belonging'. In
turn the sense of 'belonging', turning on practices of
active identification and mutual recognition, produces an
objectively observable social identity which is actively
claimed, as opposed to one assigned or attributed through
a process of classification originating beyond the realm
of interaction directly experienced by the community
participants.

Any group or individual possesses more than one
collective identity - a singular social identity is an
abstraction. Concrete human beings are constructed by a
complex of such identities, which may not be harmonious.
Competing collective identities are available to
metropolitan women on the basis of gender alone, and thus
there are a wide range of practices whose variable order
structures these identities of everyday life.

The practices structuring feminism, strategically
laying claim to recognition and active identification by
women, were derived historically from the women's
liberation movement and the more diffuse, 'woman-centred'
practices of the women's movement which encompassed and
succeeded it from the mid nineteen-seventies as discussed
in detail in Chapter 3. The central practices of
collective identification, from speech codes and forms of
interpersonal conduct to the circulation of specific texts
with their distinctive feminist discursive features and
modes of address, were both exclusive to feminism and
While at one level as part of the women’s movement, the Riley House Centre users also belonged to a specific Centre community of identification, mobilised and articulated in the first instance by broadly shared feminist practices but developed by processes of differentiation. These involved the mobilisation of a specific feminist ‘us’, opposed to other feminist groupings and to non-feminist women - potential recruits to both the movement and the Centre - as well as to the local government, which as an embodiment of bureaucracy and patriarchy constitutes the primary Other.

Feminist communities of identification are not only distinguishable from others in various ways and to varying extents, but are also ranked in relation to others. The sets of preferences, performances and competences shared by members not only provide bases for mutual recognition, but also operate as a series of markers which function to denote a superior, distinguished community as distinct from inferior ones. A particular community therefore exhibits both ‘distinctive features’ in the linguistic sense (Wilden, 1978) and indices of distinction in Bourdieu’s double sense of the term, where distinction refers to both claims to distinctiveness and to value and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986).

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1 Some forms of organization and interpersonal conduct were extended to other organizations on the left, but the combination of practices noted remained specific to feminism. (Robotham, Segal, Wainwright, 1980).
Claims to distinction by users of the Riley House Centre emerged clearly in the negotiations with the local authority, with this specific Centre being actively promoted as not only distinct from other local Centres, but also as particularly distinguished. The allocation of a new site by the council represented not only the achievement of an instrumental objective, but in the Centre user’s eyes, an acknowledgement of it’s particular markers of distinction as well as of its distinctiveness from other Centres in the Borough and thus its specific identity. On the one hand, Centre negotiators laid claim in their negotiations to a legitimation of feminism in its broadest sense, on the other hand they laid claim to a distinguished, as well as distinctive social and cultural identity for the Riley House Centre as a particular manifestation of the women’s movement. Objectively, the shared interests of, and primary identifications with, the women’s movement underpinned the community of identification at the Centre. Subjectively, in the course of the negotiations the identification with the Centre community was, on occasion, paramount.

During the negotiations for the new site, the four women in the core Collective who were most actively engaged in direct negotiations, reported back regularly to other Centre users. They discussed their progress - or lack of progress - informally, before and throughout the communal meals which preceded the group meetings. Occasionally, they continued their discussions among
themselves throughout the evening, and pursued them by telephone, from home.

At the Thursday evening Collective meetings, they would recount more formally details of their meetings with individual councillors. Details of the meetings of the relevant sub-committees and committees were noted in the Blue Book, a file kept in the front hall of Riley House, which was technically available to all Centre users, and even to casual visitors, but not known of by many, and consulted by fewer. Most Centre users who wanted to find out what was happening heard it 'on the grapevine'.

Most Centre users were highly ambivalent in their attitude to 'the council'. The council itself, and individual councillors and officers were usually referred to as 'Them'. The personal names of elected representatives were used only by the core Collective and Marje and Kate, former Collective members. For most Centre users, 'They' embodied the Other against which the Centre defined itself; 'The beaurocrats', 'The state' or 'Patriarchy'.

Different groups conceptualised this 'Other' in different ways; their participation in the negotiations varied accordingly. Members of the Women's Therapy group viewed 'Them' as bureaucratic and patriarchal, as both a manifestation of patriarchal structures and as a macro-example of masculinity. No members of this group were directly involved in the negotiations, although one was a long established local resident and rate payer and knew
at least two councillors personally. Belinda, who had

carried out administrative tasks for a national Charity

and was currently working at a Community Centre elsewhere

in the borough, was eminently suited for the task of

negotiating, but chose not to be directly involved. She

kept herself informed by telephoning members of the Core

Collective.

The Women's Therapy group in which she participated was

engaged in a long term process of setting up a Centre for

Women's Therapy elsewhere in London, as noted in

Chapter 6. Members of this group rarely attended

Collective meetings and had less at stake in securing a

new site. Nevertheless they were supportive of the Core

Collective and spoke of the need for 'a place belonging to

everyone' - that is, to everyone who used, or would be

accepted as potential users of, the Riley House Centre,

rather than 'Movement Women'.

The socialist feminist group regarded 'Them' as agents

of the state and of Capital, and in several cases this was

compounded by their identification of 'Them' as their own

employers - a significant proportion of women who

regularly attended the group were employed by the public

sector, most by local government. All the socialist

feminists supported the negotiations, many of them

actively. The attitudes of these group members towards

negotiation with the council were generally positive.

Radical feminists such as Ellen and Linda who did not

identify regularly with any particular group but rather
defined their politics, style and activities in terms of the radical feminist current within the Women’s Movement viewed ‘Them’ as examples of ‘the system’ with which in principle they refused to negotiate. This grouping mobilised around the concept of ‘Liberation’ neatly defined by Frederic Jameson as ‘freedom through separation from the old system’ (Jameson, 1984) and differed from their socialist and liberal sisters in rejecting liberal democratic structures as a terrain of struggle. For them, these constituted only the objects of struggle.

For these radical feminists, Riley House functioned as a site at which direct action against ‘the system’ was planned, and support for it mobilised. The provenance of the Centre - ‘the system’ - was not however held to be problematic; the radical feminists did support the efforts to obtain a new site, joined a rally at the Town Hall, and ironically took it for granted that the council, an embodiment of their object of struggle, should provide the site for women-only collectives as a base for their struggle.

All Centre users, then, were agreed that the Council should provide a new site. This was not an issue at any meeting where negotiations were discussed. While accepted as a primary Other, the Council was not viewed as unambiguously so; at one level, the Labour controlled Council was viewed as an ally, at least in party political terms especially by the socialist feminists. During the late nineteen-seventies Camden maintained its reputation
as a 'high spending, high quality and unfortunately, high-rise Council' (Gilbert, 1988), a description with which Centre users broadly concurred. The construction of the Council as Other was based on its perception as a representative of a wider set of structures which operated to reproduce gender hierarchy and the subordination of women, not in terms of party politics, or of being a 'bad' Council relative to others.¹

A further ambivalence emerged in attitudes towards local government, in discussions around 'entryism' - the active involvement in local government in order to achieve immediate goals and to influence policies affecting women more generally - and 'co-option' - the process whereby incorporation into the structures of local government functions to vitiate radical demands.² These tensions characterised, but did not undermine, the consensus around the necessity for the Riley House Centre identity to be maintained.

The use of a Centre 'we' at Collective meetings and in conversations outside the Centre subsumed the group 'we' which predominated in other circumstances, and was

¹ Several members of Camden Council had been threatened with being surcharged by the central government for failing to reduce council spending during the nineteen seventies, and were generally respected by Centre Users for their actions, as noted in 2.1.

consistently counterposed to 'Them'. The instrumental negotiations with the Council were central to the re-negotiation of Centre identity with Centre users actively identifying with the Centre community.

7.3. The re-negotiation of feminist identity and difference in terms of oral style

The re-negotiation of the Centre identity and the intensification of the collective identification of Centre users gained further momentum at a certain point in the negotiations with the Council when the Housing Committee proposed that the Riley House Centre should share a site with another Women's Centre. At this point, the boundaries of the Centre community became clearly demarcated. The Centre may have been in principle open to 'any feminists', but the Centre identity became strengthened in opposition to the two other feminist groupings whose site they were invited to share.

The proposal was that Riley House Centre users, who occupied a maximum of three rooms at any one time should share the already established Kings Cross Centre. This Centre was (and is) dominated by two closely linked collectives, the Wages for Housework Collective and the English Collective of Prostitutes. The Riley House Centre users were unanimous that they wanted separate premises, even if these were in the same ward as the Kings Cross Centre. It was at this point that the Centre identity was
explicitly distinguished from that of their 'sisters' at Kings Cross, and the Kings Cross Centre became constituted as an additional Other. This process also involved the mobilisation of a focused, distinctive and bounded community of identification at Riley House within the context of feminism.

All the Centre users demonstrated their affiliation to Riley House when these proposals were a topic of conversation. The small group identities which were primary during the evenings when they met, and during the communal meals which preceded the meetings, were subsumed by the collective identification of the Centre users on a broader basis. The 'we' used in these discussions as well as at Collective meetings, united the small groups, rather than referring to the 'we' of the socialist feminist group or the Women's Therapy group.

The Riley House 'we' was now counter-posed to the Kings Cross Centre 'Them' -

'We are not going in with Them!' -

but at the same time, the claims of the wider and more embracing imagined community of feminism were acknowledged.

'We can't let Them get away with it - if we shared a Centre it would be a cut in funding' -

In the first comment, the referent of 'Them' is the Kings Cross Centre; in the second it is the Council. The first use of 'we' specifically distinguishes the Riley House Centre; the second use has a broader referent which
incorporates other Centres, including Kings Cross. In the hierarchy of 'otherness' implicit in these distinctions, the Council remained at the apex. Nevertheless, the Kings Cross Collectives were continually constructed not just as different, but as Other. Even the consciousness-raising group, whose members had not used the Centre for three years, supported the Centre users with comments such as 'They have to get another place.... I mean we might want to use it sometime, and I'm not going to the Kings Cross lot'.

This comment distinguishes between the 'we' of the consciousness-raising group and the 'they' of the Centre, but aligns the speaker - and by implication the group - with Riley House against Kings Cross.

This construction of the Kings Cross Centre as 'Other' needs to be viewed not just as an effect of the general threat to the distinctive identity of the Riley House Centre which would be posed by any proposal to share a site, but as an integral part of the process of the construction of a community of identity, where the community cannot be seen as a stable identity, but is continually in process. The shift from an acknowledgement of the Kings Cross Collectives as just two related manifestations of the Movement to their construction as Other proceeded in the name of feminism itself, that is, in the name of the most encompassing community of identification.

Several other Women's Centres in the borough were regularly referred to at Riley House and also constituted
as different, and by implication inferior, but none were constructed as 'Other' in the same way as Kings Cross. The Kingsgate Centre, on the border of the borough of the Brent was often referred to as 'taken over' by a particular group of radical activists, and classified dismissively as 'collapsed' and 'hopeless'. The Drummond Street Centre situated at the centre of the borough, was known (approvingly) for having 'thrown out' the Wages for Housework Collective earlier in the decade. The Hole in the Wall, in Kentish Town, was cited approvingly by six Centre users as a key venue during the early years of the movement.

The Kings Cross Centre was not perceived in the same way as a different but comparable Centre; neither was it adequate for Riley House users to deal with it with dismissive comments as they did with Kingsgate. Wages for Housework was the only feminist grouping which had been refused regular access to Riley House, when it applied in early 1976 before the foundation of the Kings Cross Centre, as noted earlier. The refusal was based upon its perception by Riley House users as transgressing a basic rule of feminism. The perception of transgression, and hence the construction of Otherness, was based upon the Kings Cross Women's contravention of feminist communication practices.

The centrality of communication styles to feminism their functions in the processes of mutual recognition among feminists and differences in style between Centre
users are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. It was not, however, explicitly discussed by Centre users. It’s relevance to the refusal to share Riley House or Kings Cross with the other collectives does, however, emerge clearly from comments made by Centre users, all of which emphasise oral style as the significant factor in their decision.

"Wages for Housework are incredibly controlling and aggressive - at least the ones that did the talking at the Collective were ...."

"They’re not interested in anyone else, they don’t listen ... they don’t let you get a word in, they just shout, one after the other.... Everybody was really afraid they’d take over the Centre and run it their way".

It was their oral style which indicated to the Riley House women that Wages for Housework (WFH) would not "share", would not aim to reach consensus, and threatened the Riley House women with domination.

This construction of otherness was not unproblematic. At one level, Riley House users identified with the Wages for Housework Collective and extended them recognition as feminists, as one of the encompassing ‘Us’ constituted by the feminist formation as a whole.

Most agreed with some or all of the political and theoretical texts produced by members of the WFH, most notably an article entitled "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community" (James and Dalla Costa, 1973) which was widely circulated among Centre users. This textual community was not sufficient to provide a basis
for identification, however. At the level of social interaction and interpersonal communication they transgressed, and forfeited recognition as feminists at Riley House, even though they operated - with a high profile - in the name of the women's movement.

Two further factors complicated the construction of the Kings Centre as an unambiguous Other; firstly, the imperative of feminist solidarity and sisterhood and secondly issues of ethnicity and racism. In relation to the first factor, some Centre users, particularly the core collective, attempted to maintain an accommodation of diversity and difference among women as an overriding imperative. Further, they were reluctant to be seen as opposed to the Kings Cross Collectives because, at a general level, they did not want to contribute to popular perceptions of the Women's Movement as fragmented. Specifically, they wanted to avoid 'divide and rule' tactics in the local context, in the course of their negotiations with the Council.

The second factor was particularly problematic. Many Centre users were reluctant to be seen to be opposed to the Kings Cross women because a large proportion of them were black.¹

No Riley House user wished to be perceived as racist, and many were active in Women Against Racism and Facism.

¹ The term 'black' is used here in accordance with the contemporary anti-racist classifications whereby the term includes Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African and Afro-Caribbean women. Most of the WFH women were Afro-Caribbean; a small number were American.
(WARF) and the Anti-Nazi league. This disinclination to be accused of racism was particularly marked at this particular historical moment, when the women’s movement with its predominantly white membership was increasingly under fire from black women at local and national meetings, in WIRES and other broadsheets, and accused of ignoring, marginalising or subordinating questions of race and ethnicity.¹ The fragmentation of the Movement was at this period proceeding through the mobilisation of other forms of identity politics, primarily those articulated in terms of race and sexuality.

In relation to the construction of the Kings Cross women as Other, the question of racism – where racism is defined as practices discriminating against groups and individuals on the basis of classifications organized around the identification of physical attributes – seems in this case less relevant than the issue of ethnocentricism. As Moore has highlighted in her discussion of feminism and anthropology (Moore, 1988) the tendency to project the concepts and values of one ethnic population on to disparate groups and societies is, paradoxically in view of their emphasis on personal experience, particularly marked in feminist groupings.

Feminist theory and politics derived from the ‘sharing’ of experiences by groups of women, and the identification

¹ Issues around racism in the Women’s Movement emerged in the Spare Rib Collective during 1979, although they were not taken on board by the ‘mainstream’ Movement until late 1981. See Winship, 1987; Amos and Parmar, 1984; Hooks, 1983.
of the shared structural underpinnings of these gender-specific experiences. It had been easily assumed by British feminists that the structures and experiences identified in consciousness-raising groups composed primarily of white women, and the styles of behaviour and language-use which they devised to combat the 'masculinist' 'sexist' styles which were viewed as 'muting' women were perceived in the same way by their black sisters (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Hooks, 1984). The markers of feminist style were in fact ethnically specific, not least in the case of oral style.

The case for arguing that ethnocentrism, rather than racism, was the underlying dynamic is strengthened by the fact that Riley House women re-acted in similar ways to similar language practices by white women, notably women from the Socialist Workers Party who joined several of the demonstrations organised by the women's movement. Also, Indian and Afro-Carribean women who observed the co-operative style were generally welcomed at feminist venues. This also substantiates the argument that the importance of oral style in the exclusion of the Kings Cross Collectives and their construction as Other has to be understood not only in the immediate context of Riley House, the context of utterance, but in relation to the formation and operation of the women's movement itself.

In the early years of the movement, a particular oral style was developed with inclusive egalitarian and anti-authoritarian objectives, and was specifically designed
to counter the advantages of 'middle-class' (educated) women in speaking in public. By the late nineteen seventies, the 'co-operative style' had become a naturalised feminist form, a social and cultural marker of feminism (Scherer and Giles, 1979).

Deborah Cameron has defined the co-operative style as based on the principles that women at feminist gatherings 'Should not raise their voices to silence others, that solidarity must be expressed frequently, that women must give way to each other rather than competing for the floor and ... that long silences are tolerated' (Cameron, 1985, p. 42).

This marker of feminism was operative at Riley House, and specifically developed at the Women's Therapy group so that women spoke in turn. Most Centre users had first encountered it at consciousness-raising groups and viewed it as an integral part of the 'sharing' of experiences which, for them, marked their entry into the Movement.

Centre users reported on their group styles in terms which relate closely to Cameron's

'No one hogs the discussion, and its definitely not done to interrupt. People kind of take it in turn to speak'.

'You can just sit there in silence if you want to. You don't have to keep a conversation going. It's a relief when you get used to it'.

One of Cameron's informants reported her first encounter with the co-operative style in a similar manner
'It struck me the minute we started, all the silence and letting people finish' (Cameron, 1985, p. 43).

This co-operative style, a key marker of feminism, was contravened by the Kings Cross women

'They don’t listen ... they don’t let you get a word in, they just shout'.

The Kings Cross women were perceived as authoritarian and therefore as not fully feminist, in terms of oral communication.

It is important to note firstly that the oral style which constructed the Kings Cross Centre as 'Other' is that relating to verbal conduct, rather than to the verbal means available to the speakers (Hymes, 1974). The speech of the Kings Cross women employed the same lexical codes and embraced the same referents as that of the Riley House users; in print, the communication would not contravene feminist rules, even if there was disagreement about the content.

Secondly, it is necessary to distinguish between socio-linguistic and para-linguistic features of oral style. Most analysis of oral style as a marker of social identity focuses upon verbal means, including speech registers, dialect, accent and narrative structures (Ong, 1981; Finnegan, 1988; Cameron, 1984; Spender 1977). Markers of ethnicity, class and, to some extent gender, operate in this way and this fact influenced the design of the co-
operative style.¹

What is at issue in identifying oral style as 'fully' feminist are the para-linguistic features, those of pitch, volume inflection and pace. (‘They don’t let you get a word in ... they shout’). These stylistic features which cannot be easily transcribed are of primary importance in any social interaction; they are specifically emphasized in the co-operative style, but are frequently marginalised in ethnography (Tedlock, 1983; Culler, 1988). It was precisely the para-linguistic features, the temporal structures - patterns of hesitation, interruption and silence - pitch and volume, which always function as modal operators indicating degrees of assurance, aggression, diffidence and so on, which played a key part in the construction of the Kings Cross Women as Other, non-feminist. Indeed their use of para-linguistic features consistently associated with masculine usage (Graddol and Swan, 1989; Spender, 1977) invited their classification as anti-feminist.

In summary, the verbal conduct of the Kings Cross Women, and particularly the para-linguistic features of their interpersonal communication styles, underpinned the construction of the Kings Cross Centre as Other. This

¹ Social marker theory in socio-linguistics postulates 'Women's Speech' as deviant and/or subservient, and characterizes it in terms of more back-channelling, and more qualifiers and approximations (Lakoff, 1975; P.M. Smith, 1979). The category of 'Women's Speech' is constructed through stereotypes, which are not helpful given the number and range of varieties of English usage (Cameron, 1985). The point at issue here is that 'co-operative speech' is characteristic of feminist rather than female modes.
construction was achieved in the name of feminism - on the basis of the transgression of feminist codes of communication - and functioned to intensify the subjective aspects of collective identification at Riley House. Simultaneously, the negotiations with the primary Other - the Council as an examplar of bureaucracy and patriarchy - were conducted as part of a strategy for the development and consolidation of the women’s movement as a whole. The Movement, then, provided the ultimate basis for the communities of identity at both Women’s Centre, but also functioned to both construct the Kings Cross Centre as Other and to produce Riley House as a more 'distinguished' Centre, in the eyes of its users.¹

7.4. Relations of exchange and power in negotiations with local government

The actual conduct of the negotiations between the women from Riley House actively engaged in the pursuit of their immediate objectives and the agents of the local

¹ The Kings Cross Collectives have recently been excluded from the encompassing community of Sisterhood by most feminist groupings. In 1987, Shand commented that "the organisation is well known to many feminists who have encountered them regularly over the past fifteen years" and described their tactics as "bullying and intimidatory behaviour".

She also noted that the organization based at the Kings Cross Centre became known in the nineteen-eighties by a variety of names in addition to Wages for Housework and the English Collective of Prostitutes, and concludes:

'There is an increasing determination to inform as many women as possible, so that forewarned, they may avoid becoming the victims of the future' (Shand, 1987, p. 7).
authority need to be located in the context of the Borough of Camden, and in the political climate of local government in England during the latter half of the nineteen seventies.

Camden local government operated with a certain degree of autonomy from other levels of government, particularly in the provision of personal services, with statutory functions and powers to raise revenue directly through the rating system. In the mid nineteen seventies, only ten per cent of grants from central government were tied to specific services. At this point in post-war history, English local governments received ninety per cent of their total grants for current expenditure for unspecified general purposes (Bowman and Hampton, 1983).1

Given some degree of autonomy from the top tier of local government, the Greater London Council, and from Central government, an independent source of income and local elections, Camden like other English Local Authorities conformed to the criteria of representative democracy. Following the re-organization of local government in 1974 in line with the recommendations of the Bains report of 1969, Camden adopted the ‘corporate management’ model of local government which was designed to permit consultation with a range of interest groups within its boundaries and to proceed in the name of

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1 Bowman and Hampton in their comparative study of local government note the specifically English character of corporate management during this period, and point to clear differences between English, Scottish and Northern Irish local government (Bowman and Hampton, 1983).
The relations between the Women's Centre and the personal services agencies of the local authority were complex and many-stranded. As noted in 2.1 the Centre was dealt with by different departments throughout its career; by the Social Services, which agreed the provision of a site for the Women's Refuge in Belsize Park which became the meeting place for the first Women's Centre and by the Committee for Leisure Services during its period at Riley House. In each case the Housing Committee was responsible for site allocation. The social services were also involved in the plans to re-develop Riley House as a residential school for handicapped children.

Centre users also related indirectly to the leave services organised by the local authority in their day to day practices at the Centre in which the Centre functioned as an alternative advice referral agency. Further, as noted in 4.2 and 6.1, a number of Centre users were employed by the personal services sector of local government, in social and community work.

In other capacities, Centre users campaigned for changes in legislation at a national level, and opposed some of the current practices of social services administration at a local level, as in the case of the occupation of the local office of the Department of Health and Social Services.

'The Council', while unambiguously constructed as 'Them' was implicated in a wide range of Centre activities.
at an informal level. In principle, the Centre users who were actively engaged in the negotiations with them maintained their view of local government structures and agents as embodiments of the state, bureaucracy and patriarchy. Pragmatically, however, the women took a more selective and personalised view of the local authority. They operated through a network of social relations which crossed local authority boundaries and which cross-cut the distinctions between the public and private domains. The Centre negotiations activated these relations with individuals who participated in the formal political sector at local and national levels, relations established in a wide range of social and cultural milieux, some deriving from the social locations from which the movement emerged, as discussed in Chapter 3, and re-activated through informal social encounters.

Marje, an American member of the founding Collective who was involved in the negotiations for the Riley House site, described her experiences of lobbying the Social Services and Housing Committees of the local authority, and the ultimate recourse of Centre users to individual councillors

"The housing people didn’t come up with anything and we sat, and sat, and sat, and we finally discovered that we’d been had. Social Services was right on, right on, but neither they nor the Housing were doing anything. So ... we went around for three weeks looking at empty properties and they turned all of those down. We said very specifically that we wanted a place in a busy street, preferably in Camden Town which is right in the centre of the borough. Well, we got fed up. I think we put it to them at the end of April, their meeting about it was early summer, and the
Housing Committee meeting was the following month, so by the end of July we were in line for premises, but nothing was going to happen, so we got busy getting in touch with councillors again....

The councillors we chose were actually people who knew somebody. Three or four people in the group knew councillors, and this provided the initial way in. At least we knew the councillors we were seeing were sympathetic.

Some of these councillors had been encountered in the borough, and viewed the proposal for a Women's Centre as an auxiliary resource which would support their own constituency work

"One guy (Councillor A) was very definitely pro-us because he said so many women came to his - what are those things called? - surgery, with personal problems. He didn’t think he could do a thing for them and he thought, here is somebody who will".

Other councillors were familiar from other political enterprises; Councillor B had been involved in organising opposition to the Private Members Bills introduced in Parliament to change Abortion Law of 1967. Councillor C was an old acquaintance from Marianne’s undergraduate days in the New Left, and was appealed to directly in the name of friendship and fellowship.

These social relations with local councillors, and in one case with the local Member of Parliament, were distinguished clearly from relations with ‘The Council’. Individuals may be ‘sympathetic’ or ‘politically o.k.’, but the Council itself was still viewed with active hostility. The alliances which were constructed or
activated by Centre users during the negotiations for the Riley House site and re-activated during the Riley House users' negotiations for a new site were, however, based on social networks which derived not exclusively from Centre-based activities or local initiatives or campaigns undertaken by the women's movement, but from a wider field of political action and social relationships often initiated before the emergence of women's liberation in the political milieux from which it emerged.

The particular social relationships activated through the network by the members of the Collective involved in the negotiations constitute good examples of the generic 'special relationships' identified as central to 'grass roots community politics' in urban sociology (Cockburn, 1977; Dearlove 1979; Saunders, 1981).

As discussed in Chapter 5, the analysis of the community politics of the nineteen seventies is organized around a generally held distinction between the community politics organised 'from above' which characterized English local government attempts at corporate management during the nineteen seventies, and 'grass roots' community politics mobilised 'from below', the rhetoric and social arena of which contributed to the development of the women's movement (Cockburn, 1977; Rowbotham, 1989; Little, 1988).

Community politics 'from above' is organized around the mobilisation of institutional participation, the objective of which is the provision of a means of identification
with the polity which is more salient and wide-ranging than their particularistic identity, whether this identity is based in locality, class, race or gender. The achievement of the identification of large numbers of people with the polity forms the basis of the legitimacy of rules and agents and the basis of consent to its actions (Lowenthal, 1984).

This form of community mobilisation, and its role in the organization of consent to the current structures and actions of local - and national - government, constituted the issue around which Centre users debated the relative advantages of 'entryism' and the dangers of co-option or incorporation. No one at the Centre wanted their participation in negotiations with the Council to contribute to the legitimation of the polity. Centre users saw themselves rather as engaged in grass roots community politics, a form of political action viewed as signifying and enabling the involvement of 'ordinary' people in challenging existing political structures and securing a fairer deal for a relatively powerless section of the population.

As discussed in Chapter 6, influential sections of the women's movement, apart from radical feminists, explicitly advocated 'community control' tactics. This form of community politics permits the maintenance of a distance between the campaigning sections of the population and the formal political structures; it is articulated around and depends upon the establishment and exploitation of
'special relationships' between the campaigners and those whom they challenge, or from whom they attempt to win concessions (Cockburn, 1977; Dearlove, 1979; Saunders, 1981).

The core Collective members engaged in the negotiations did indeed activate these 'special relationships', but the nature of these relationships requires some examination in relation to two other commonly held positions concerning 'grass roots' community politics and feminist politics.

The first position is that while community campaign groups may succeed in securing limited objectives, they also result in the symbolic legitimation of the system without securing any fundamental concessions or system-based change (Cockburn, 1977; Saunders, 1981, p. 288). The second is that the special relationships consist of the activation of feminist groups by political agents as 'auxiliary political resources' without any reciprocal action on the polity (Randall, 1982; Pym, 1974).

The first position does not apply directly in the case of the Women's Centre - at the end of the period of fieldwork the Centre users obtained the concession of a new site, but withheld the legitimation of 'the system'; they activated special relationships originating outside the field of local feminist activities, and retained a fairly cynical view of the operations of the local authority.

This withholding of an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of 'the System' emerges in comments made with
reference to the local authority plans to convert Riley House to a residential Centre for handicapped children. Collective members perceived this as a deliberate attempt to develop a conflict of interests between different community sectors.

'It's a case of divide and rule....'

'They put us in a situation where we had to say "is it for women or for handicapped children". Women - feminists - versus children and the handicapped... you know, if they have to make cuts, then the Centre is nothing compared to the other things Social Services does, and so on....'

'How are we supposed to fight flats for handicapped people? It's a weird political decision. We want a Women's Centre for feminists - it could be used for national conferences, not just for Camden women - they propose flats for handicapped people. And this from a Council with a good record for building new flats....'

When the provision of a new site was finally agreed, in a former commercial property in the same ward as the Kings Cross Centre, another Collective member merely remarked: 'They had no option'.

The individual Councillors with whom the Centre users liaised were held responsible for the concession, rather than 'the Council' per se, together with the influence of feminist formation at a more general level. This attribution of influence to feminism and the women's movement requires examination in relation to the position that feminists as figure primarily - or even exclusively - as 'auxiliary resources' at local and national governments, i.e. that they are mobilised for electoral
support locally, and lobbying for parliamentary members who initiate or support specific legislation at the national level (March and Chambers, 1981).

In the case of the Women’s Centre, the ‘special relationships’ involved an element of the mobilisation of ‘auxiliary’ political resources, but in fact they functioned primarily as reciprocal exchange.

In the case of Councillor A, cited above, the Women’s Centre appears to have been perceived and lobbied for, as an auxiliary resource to deal with constituency problems. Councillor A was himself recruited as an auxiliary resource by the Centre Collective, however, first when the original Riley House site was provided, and then during the negotiations for a new site. By this time, the referral function of the Women’s Centre whereby women with problems were given detailed information on their rights, and advice on how to pursue their claims through legal or executive government institutions, was a function which he wanted to retain. Thus an element of reciprocal exchange was involved in the relations between the Centre users and the Councillor.

Councillor B may be viewed as having mobilised feminist resources in opposing a specific piece of legislation; but from a feminist perspective, Councillor B had himself provided a political resource for the Campaign for ‘A Woman’s Right to Choose’, a central plank of the women’s movement policy. Like Councillor C he had been activated as a political resource in support of the socialist
feminist current of the movement through a social network, a form characterized by reciprocity.

The relations between Centre activists and individual Councillors functioned through reciprocal exchange, rather than as a one directional activation of political resources as Pym and Randall argue. The Centre users did not perceive the Councillors as standing in relations of social debt or credit, but as partners in an exchange of services extending over several years and activated by both partners in local and national contexts.

The exchanges between Centre activists and individual Councillors also need to be seen in relation to the status of feminist politics more generally, in party politics and in political culture in its broadest sense. While Council departments may well have viewed the Centre users as just one more 'citizen's body' or by individual Councillors as one more interest group whose electoral support could be secured by the achievement of a new site, the Centre users were also perceived as the representatives of both larger numbers of women in the constituencies, through their articulation of 'Women's issues', and of the women's movement.

The Centre users did not constitute a constituency electoral group in any simple way, however. As individuals they were not easily identified with the local electorate. Some did not vote in local or general elections on ideological grounds - 'Participation not representation' and 'Beggars can't be choosers'. As noted
in Chapter 6, some lived outside the borough; at least three Centre users moved frequently within the private rented housing sector and were not registered to vote anywhere.

The Centre community, with their primary identification with the women's movement transcending local - and in some cases national - ties, did not see themselves as 'belonging' to any specific interest group except as women and as feminists. As women, Centre users experienced their position as female citizens as subordinate; as feminists they required compensation from the system, and structural change. Their part in the informal exchanges characterising the negotiations rested upon their affiliation with other feminist groupings, and the status of the women's movement and the feminist formation at a general level.

By the late nineteen seventies the feminist formation - in the double sense of a social association and a discursive formation - had achieved an influence which exceeded the localised influences secured through specific campaigns and informal social networks. The codes and the social relations and organizational forms underpinning and informing its discourses had affected, through diffusion and selective appropriations, the structuration of other political social and cultural discourses.

Feminist discourses had achieved a degree of legitimation - indeed institutionalisation - which inflected the responses to claims or demands made in the
name of feminism in a wide range of institutions, from political parties to educational institutions and the mass media; local government institutions and agents were not immune from this.

Feminist scholarship had effectively been legitimised through the institutionalisation of Women's Studies in higher education from 1974, by the adoption of a range of feminist texts in the syllabi of secondary schools, and by publication as discussed in Chapter 4. During the period of negotiations, the intellectual productions of the feminist formation had, in Bourdieu's terms, 'come of age'; feminist cultural productions had secured a degree of legitimacy in the intellectual field (Bourdieu, 1986).

In pragmatic political terms, the political parties promoted some short-term feminist objectives, if not wider-ranging feminist projects, subsequent to the legislation on Equal Rights, Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay, and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission (Wilson, 1986; Campbell, 1986; Delmar, 1986). The formation of the socialist feminist groups, and the success of the women's movement in mobilising women who were not aligned to any specific party in local and national campaigns, had secured an influence for feminist politics which informed the decision-making strategies of the Labour party and arguably of the Conservative party (Campbell, 1986) in the run-up to the General Elections which was under way during the negotiations.

The broader frame of feminist politics provided a key
context for the entry of local Councillors into reciprocal exchanges with the core Collective members of the Women’s Centre, a context in which Councillors offered services and resources as well as deploying those available from the Women’s Centre and feminist campaigns and influences at a wider level.

In summary, the negotiations provided a situation in which the instrumental objectives of the Centre users can clearly be shown to have been implicated in the mobilisation of a community of identification at the Women’s Centre. The expressive and instrumental dimensions of the Centre as a specific community of identity and as a local manifestation of the women’s movement are closely intertwined.

The differentiation of the Riley House from its sister Centre at Kings Cross was precipitated in the course of the negotiations with the local authority by the proposal that the different Centre Collectives should share a single site. The terms invoked as a basis for the distinctiveness of the Riley House, and for its claims to being ‘more’ feminist and hence distinguished, were framed in terms of the movement which provided the basis for the practices of Collective identification at both Centres, and were articulated around the transgression by the Kings Cross women of feminist rules of verbal conduct.

These mobilisations of difference and distinction both permitted a bounded social identity and a degree of social closure at Riley House and affirmed an identification with
the encompassing community of feminism which also spawned
the Kings Cross Centre.

The negotiations with the Council proceeded through
informal social relations, some of which derived from
shared New Left and radical politics social locations,
which secured the concession of a new, separate, site for
the Centre, without contributing to the legitimation of
‘the system’ of which local government is an exemplar and
embodiment, but without effecting any structural or
systemic change either.

The negotiations can be seen as operating in two ways
in relation to the Women’s Centre. Firstly, they may be
viewed as a centrifugal force, functioning to distract
Centre users from the daily business of Riley House and to
promote social relationships derived from outside the
Centre and from the margins of the women’s movement.
Secondly, these exogenous relationships paradoxically
operate to intensify the Collective identification of
Centre users and thereby consolidate, for the duration,
their community of identity. From this point of view, the
negotiations with the Council may be seen to exert a
centripetal force, functioning to focus the
identifications of Centre users on their own Centre, re-
defining the boundaries of community and promoting a
degree of social closure.
8. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have attempted to show the necessity of relating the analysis of the Women’s Centre to the analysis of the women’s movement. While the social relations and practices at the Centre and the negotiations of meaning which took place there have to be examined in the specific context of the Centre, they cannot be studied in the context of the Centre alone. They have to be viewed in relation to the women’s movement, from which many of the practices derived.

Contrary to the conventional position that the women’s movement is organized on the basis of the small groups and the relations between these groups, I have argued that the women’s movement is organised on the basis of ego-centred social networks linking groups and is best conceptualised as the social field of feminist networks. This social field has been distinguished from the discursive and sectarian dimensions of the movement; the former has been related to the imagined community of feminism among geographically dispersed and socially disparate women and the latter to the Women’s Movement which is indeed organised on the basis of groups rather than individuals.

I have taken issue with the widespread practice of classifying Women’s Centres as ‘local manifestations’ of the women’s movement on the grounds that this classification implies that there is a relatively unitary and consistent set of structures and processes which can
manifest themselves in comparable ways in a variety of forms. On this basis, the structure and organisation of a Women's Centre could be inferred from a description of the movement as a unitary phenomenon. I have also drawn attention to the lack of analysis of Women's Centres except as the context of small groups where the structure and processes of the groups are taken as the primary objects of study.

I have presented the Centre at Riley House as a specific feminist community of identification within a whole constellation of feminist communities distributed across the social field of the movement under the umbrella of the imagined community of feminism. The Centre community generated its symbolic boundary through its development of a number of socio-cultural processes through which, as a collectivity, it discerned its distinctive existence. These shared processes and their variations are illustrated in the final sections of chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6.

It is argued that the symbolic boundary was permeable for most of the Centre's existence. The social networks of Centre users crossed the boundary and extended across the social field of the women's movement and beyond it, and women participated as individuals in a range of feminist groups and activities in addition to the Centre, which were discussed in chapter 4. The central thesis proposed here is that the Centre community was mobilised and maintained by means of these networks and this

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The maintenance of the Centre community is addressed in the context of the fragmentation of the women’s movement and the division between the socialist feminists and radical feminists at a national level, which is discussed in chapter 3. It has been argued that the negotiation of different feminist positions and the accommodation of difference at the Centre which are examined in chapters 4, 6 and 7 ultimately rests upon first, the existence of ego-centred social networks extending beyond the centre and the availability of other feminist venues, organisations and activities to individual Centre users and secondly, the strategies of exclusion deployed by the Centre users.

The existence of the Centre community, in short, depends upon the permeability of its boundary and social links rather than a strong boundary and social isolation.

In the face of a threat to the Centre identity, the Centre users identified with each other more intensely, and the boundary of the Centre became more clearly demarcated. It has been argued that these processes, were triggered from outside the community; the threat of the Riley House Centre being merged with (or possibly submerged by) another Women’s Centre served to activate a self conscious collective identification with the Centre community as a different and distinctive feminist entity, through the construction of a feminist grouping as a primary Other.

The re-negotiation of the Centre identity has been
discussed in chapter 7, in the context of an examination of the negotiations with the local Council for instrumental objectives. It has been argued there, against the conventional position on new social movements, that the instrumental and expressive dimensions of the women's movement, in the specific form in which they were articulated at the Centre, are closely intertwined, and that negotiations for short-term objectives in this case at least produced a stronger community of identification.

In short, the internal processes by means of which the Centre community was mobilised derived from the women's movement and the discursive formation of feminism, and in reaction to the groups which constituted the Women's Movement. The activation of a self-conscious identification of Centre users as distinctive and a degree of social closure was triggered by specific processes set in train outside the Centre. The combination of exogenous factors and internal processes, it has been argued, constituted the Centre community.

It has been argued in chapter 2 that the movement itself has to be examined in terms of the shared concrete social locations from which it emerged as well as its roots in a particular historical and social conjuncture. The activation by Centre users of social networks which were established in these shared locations has been shown to contribute to the maintenance of Council resources for the Centre (although in the context of the national movement the continuation of these networks promoted
heated debate with feminists arguing for separatism)

It has also been asserted throughout the thesis and argued in detail in chapter 4, that the analysis of the Women's Centre has to take account of the routes taken by the women to the Centre rather as well as the social composition of the Centre. Also, the life stories of the women concerned, and their accounts of their participation in other feminist groups have demonstrated that the version of feminism which they espouse, and its place in the continuum of individual orientation to collective orientation varied according to their changing family relations and personal circumstances. Just as there is no single shared version of feminism at the Centre, there appear to have been few personal feminist identities which remained fixed and static.

The fluid social composition, extensive ego-centred social networks, the different and changing feminist identities and the permeable boundaries of the Women's Centre all contributed, together with some strategic exclusions and (paradoxically) the threat to its existence, to the maintenance of a distinctive feminist community of identification at the Women's Centre in the context of the fragmentation of the women's movement.
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